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Margaret

Stourton.

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MARGARET STOURTON;

OR,

A YEAR

OF

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MARGARET STOURTON;

OR,

A Year of Governess Life.

CHAPTER I.

"Through waves and clouds and storms
He gently clears thy way.
Wait thou His time; thy darkest night
Shall end in brightest day."

CAPTAIN STOURTON had seen many years of active service in the Royal Navy. He had been in China and the South of Africa, and twice for a long period in the West Indies, whence he had returned so seriously out of health, that he decided to retire on half-pay, and settle in the neighbourhood of a town where he might secure the help of masters and schools in the education of his children.

A small accession of fortune, to which he had become entitled by the successful issue of a long-pending lawsuit, enabled him to take a good, comfortable house called Witham Grange, to which a

moderate number of acres was attached. The house stood within easy distance of Wilmington, and Captain Stourton at once sent his eldest boy to the grammar school in that town.

William was the eldest of the family, then came Margaret, Lucy, and Katie, and then John, who was long considered "the baby," owing to his having no successor to dispute the title with him. Years flew by, during which the farm prospered, the children grew, and all seemed smiling around them. Margaret, who had arrived at sixteen, was a very nice-looking girl, tall and slight, and with a very sensible, pleasing expression of countenance; her two younger sisters were all that their parents could desire in children of their age. William had attained his eighteenth year, and the highest class in the school. His inclinations had at one time been rather divided between the University and the Army, but finally he decided in favour of the first, and he expected to get an Exhibition, and go to Oxford. John was also at school, but looked forward to entering the Navy shortly.

But, alas! these hopes and plans for the future received a check equally sudden and grievous. A mercantile house in which the greater part of Captain Stourton's fortune was embarked most unexpectedly failed; undreamed-of liabilities started up on all sides; and the happy and prosperous family at Witham were in a moment brought to the very verge of ruin.

Nothing could be more beautiful than the way

in which they bore this terrible trial. Great sympathy was shown for them; tradespeople sending in things for which they could not expect payment, servants offering to stay on reduced wages, and many friends coming forward with substantial help.

The Wilmington lawyer, an old and valued friend of the Stourtons, took the case in hand, and found that their income would be reduced to about two hundred a year, but this included Captain Stourton's half-pay. Except for the kindness of a distant relation, Sir Edward Stourton, the family would have been in a very pitiable condition. Of course Witham Grange was immediately given up, and they removed to a small cottage at Teesdale, a village about six miles from Wilmington.

Sir Edward undertook to pay John's school expenses until he was prepared for the Navy, and also to give him his outfit. William took the vacant second mastership at the grammar school, and as he was clever and steady, and a great favourite with the head-master, he was likely to do well. And so passed on several years of a more contracted but scarcely less happy family life.

CHAPTER II.

"A life that all the Muses decked
With gifts of grace that might express
All comprehensive tenderness."

TENNYSON.

THE little drawing-room at Teesdale looked very cheerful one evening about six years after the Stourtons first settled there. The night was somewhat cold, and Captain Stourton was sitting by the fire, enjoying the luxury of a newspaper, which had been sent in by a neighbour. Mrs. Stourton was knitting; Margaret was at the table, busily studying German, with dictionary and note-book by her side; and Lucy was writing a letter.

"Getting on, my dear?" said Mrs. Stourton to Margaret.

"Yes, I hardly ever have to refer to the dictionary now; and, Mamma, I don't think you heard that Miss Schlechter said that the last exercises and translations I sent her were all very well done;" and Margaret looked up with a pretty bright smile, colouring a little at reporting such commendations. She laughed as she caught the absurd expression of Lucy's face.

"What is the matter with you, Lucy?" she inquired.

"Well, if you *ask* me, the matter is, I am sorry to see how very conceited those German proceedings are fast making you; but don't begin to argue about it, or I shall not have time to finish my letter (which is an extremely important one) before tea."

"Or, rather, you are afraid of the difficulty of supporting such an assertion as you have just made," replied Margaret, merrily.

"That's right, Madge, don't allow her to be so saucy," said her father.

"Ah, Papa, I confess I am sorry to see that you, like the rest, are blind to Margaret's imperfections."

"Hold your naughty tongue, and let me go on with my paper."

"Oh, willingly," and with a shrug of her shoulders, Lucy again devoted herself to her writing.

For more than a month, Katie, the third daughter, had been with some friends at the sea-side. She was not in good health, and had on this account caused her parents much anxiety. John was somewhere off Sydney, when he last wrote; well and happy, and delighted with his profession. William had been a clergyman nearly six months. He had been a great comfort to his parents. His college career was most satisfactory. He had been extremely fortunate in obtaining pupils after he got his Exhibition, and was elected to a scholarship which enabled him to pass through college with

out putting his family to any expense on his account.

But, somehow or other, during the last two years the Stourtons certainly had not grown richer. Captain Stourton, who was often ailing, had latterly been much less well. He was strongly advised to try a different air in England, or to go to some German baths, but his means would not allow of either the one or the other.

Katie had required many things which she could not have without great pinching on the part of the rest of the family. There was no capital to fall back upon, so that, when once in debt, it was a very hard matter to get clear again.

Margaret and Lucy often talked over these things with heavy hearts, but help had come (as they said in looking back) on more than one occasion when least expected. Yes; they would trust and hope. Their chief cause of anxiety was their father's failing health. If they could but devise some means for giving him change of air and scene, they would willingly bear additional privations themselves.

The German studies had been interrupted by the entrance of the maid-servant, who brought in a note for Margaret, and then turning to Captain Stourton, said—

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Asheton has sent two brace of partridges and a hare, by Peter Thomson."

"Oh! very kind, very kind," said Captain Stour-

ton. "Poor old Peter, I have not seen him for a long time; I will come into the kitchen, Susan, and look at the birds. Lend me a shilling," he said, turning to his wife; "it's a long time since I gave the old fellow any thing."

"Nothing like a present of game to make Papa generous," whispered Lucy; "I wish I could catch a few partridges to present to him."

"You shall catch something else, Miss Lucy, for your impertinence," said her father. "Come, do you hear? Come along with me, and we'll see if we can't get Peter to tell us one of his yarns."

"Yes, Papa, in one moment, but I do so want to know what Mrs. Asheton has been writing to Margaret about. She is looking as grave over the letter as Molly Tibbs looks at me, when she thinks me uncivil to her cat."

Margaret laughed at this idea, and, looking up, said—

"My note may be read by any one," and she handed it to her mother. "But you will be disappointed, I'm afraid, Lucy, if you expect to find much in it. The postscript is specially addressed to you, Papa." The note was as follows:

Dearest Margaret,

I want particularly to see you to-morrow; come early, if you possibly can. I will send the children to meet you, and they shall leave this about ten o'clock. I am so sorry I must ask you to come

without telling you I shall send the pony carriage for you; but the fact is, Dick is still too lame to use, and Mr. Asheton is obliged to go to King's Nympton, so I am not able to send the other pony, as he must ride it there. I am so sorry, but I hope you will not be very tired. I shall keep you all the longer on the plea of your resting.

Yours most affectionately,

CAROLINE ASHETON.

Wilton, September 27.

P.S.—*My brother has just sent us a large hamper of game. I know Captain Stourton agrees with me in his appreciation of it, so tell him I hope he will like what I am sending with this note. Kindest remembrances to you all.*

"How very cruel of Mrs. Asheton!" said Lucy.

"Cruel, my dear?" said her mother.

"Why yes, Mamma, if she really has any thing particular to say, it is hard to leave us all in ignorance till Margaret's return; but I dare say she only wants her as a companion while Mr. Asheton is at King's Nympton. You must come back early, Margaret, to relieve our curiosity."

"I shall make no promises, Lucy. Your patience wants a little exercise, I plainly perceive."

"Precisely what you would have said to comfort Sisyphus."

"Lucy, you are too bad, upon my word."

Lucy went into the kitchen after her father, and

exercised her powers in amusing old Peter, who listened to her with wondering admiration, and talked in his broadest vernacular.

That evening the sisters had a long and serious talk together over their family affairs. It had struck both of them that their mother had latterly appeared more anxious than she used to be, and to feel it more difficult than ever to manage with their very small means. Although Margaret and Lucy always endeavoured to be cheerful, especially in the presence of their parents, it was impossible for them not to give way sometimes to feelings of depression and gloomy foreboding.

People who have never known what it is to be obliged constantly to say "no" to things that are not extravagances, but almost necessaries, cannot tell how at times it weighs on the spirits to be constantly striving in every possible way, to limit requirements so as to bring them within the scope of means; nor can any who have not this painful experience know how great are the difficulties that have to be contended with.

CHAPTER III.

"It is thy pity makes me weep,
My soul was strong before."

THE following morning Margaret set out on her walk to Wilton. Her sister was obliged to be busy at home, but her mother went part of the way with her, and soon after they parted, Margaret was met by Mrs. Asheton's four merry children, with Miss Hood, their nursery governess. They were all delighted to see Margaret, who was an immense favourite with the children, and who realized Miss Hood's ideal of what a young lady should be.

Mrs. Asheton was prepared for her approach by the joyous shouts of the little boys, who ran on before towards home, calling out, "She is come, Margaret is come," at the top of their small voices.

Their mother welcomed her warmly, and led her up stairs to take off her shawl and bonnet, then they returned to the pretty drawing-room, where Mrs. Asheton put her into the most comfortable chair in the room, and told her she must rest there till luncheon was ready, which it would be very shortly.

Margaret was extremely fond of Mrs. Asheton; they had been great friends ever since the Ashetons came to Wilton. She was sister to Lord Brinkworth, who had a house about two miles from Wilton. Margaret had seen more society at the Rectory than any where else; their circumstances prevented the Stourtons going out much, but whenever any pleasant people were coming to dine or stay at Wilton, Mrs. Asheton always managed if possible to invite Margaret, or one of her sisters, under the plea of wanting some one to help her with her guests; which, however, they well knew was not her chief reason for asking them, by any means.

"You look so young," began Mrs. Asheton, stroking Margaret's hair, "that I don't know what to think of it, after all. But you know, dear," she continued, after a little pause, "that you have several times lately talked to me a good deal, and very openly, about your difficulties and anxieties, and have seemed to like me to understand about them. I have been thinking very much about you all, for you are all very dear to me, but more especially you, Margaret; and I have wished very much I could see my way towards helping you. If by what I am going to say I hurt your feelings in ever so slight a degree, I am sure you will believe me when I say that the pain to myself of knowing that I do so will more than equal that I cause you, and"—

But Margaret interrupted her by assuring her

that she trusted her kindness too well to be afraid of hearing whatever she might have to tell her. So Mrs. Asheton promised to hesitate no longer, though she still felt it very difficult to put what she wanted to say into words that satisfied herself.

"I had a letter yesterday morning from my aunt, Mrs. Lyndsey," she continued, taking one from her pocket, "in which she tells me that another niece of hers, Lady North, is in great perplexity in consequence of finding that her governess is, quite unexpectedly, obliged to leave her. But I will read you what she says." The part interesting to Margaret was as follows, "Louisa North is much perplexed by her governess being obliged to give up returning to her. Just at this moment, when all is settled for Louisa's going abroad with Roger and Emily (who is less well, too, I am sorry to hear), it is, to say the least, very annoying. In fact, to delay till she finds some one to suit her, may make a most material difference to Emily's health; and yet, what else to do she scarcely knows. Do you know of any one likely to suit her, do you think? The old nurse at Northcourt is an unusually superior person in her way, but it is very much to be desired that the governess should be worthy of all confidence, and thoroughly lady-like. To secure which two requisites, Louisa will let the want of accomplishments weigh but little, if *all* cannot be combined, and the salary she would give would be liberal."

When Mrs. Asheton had read this she paused, and then went to the table to make an alteration in the arrangement of the flowers in the vase. She wanted to give Margaret a few moments for reflection before she spoke again. Then, resuming her seat, she said, "Now you know, dearest, why I wanted to see you to-day. I don't want you to say hastily what you think about it. I dare say I can guess what you are feeling; reality is, I know well, so different from imagination. I thought I would tell you of my aunt's letter; but, after all, the thing may in no way suit you, for you may, perhaps, quite shrink from the reality of what, when only a picture in your mind, seemed to be the sort of thing you were longing to grasp. And not only so," she continued, "but although you may perhaps be feeling glad that your wishes have a chance of being fulfilled, it may be almost a shock to you to find the possibility of entering a new sphere of life thus unexpectedly opened to you."

Margaret's eyes were fixed on the fire, as she leaned forward in her chair, and her lip quivered as she tried to keep back the tears which would force themselves into her eyes, spite of all her efforts to keep them back.

Mrs. Asheton kissed her pale cheek, as she told her how thoroughly she entered into her feelings, and how sincerely she could sympathize with her; and although there was a tone in her voice which was delicious to Margaret's ear, it seemed for a

moment to make the tears come all the faster. But she quickly recovered herself, and words were at her command.

Then they talked long and earnestly, Margaret at first expressing the gratitude she felt for Mrs. Asheton's constant unvarying kindness, and then going on to question whether she could really be fit for such a position as the one referred to in Mrs. Lyndsey's letter.

With regard to that, Mrs. Asheton said she had no misgivings; she felt that she might recommend Margaret with the most perfect confidence. She believed from what little she knew of Lady North, that she would be more than satisfied, and indeed think herself extremely fortunate, if she could leave her children with Margaret. "Besides," added Mrs. Asheton, "Lady North would scarcely think of you as a stranger, when she knew you were my great friend; and you combine in yourself all she wants, for you are accomplished, in addition to all the rest of the qualifications she desires."

"Oh no, not accomplished," said Margaret.

"Well, at all events, if you won't let me call you that, I may at least say from my own knowledge that you understand French thoroughly."

"Thanks to Mademoiselle's kindness," said Margaret.

"That you play very nicely, and sing charmingly; now be quiet," she added, as Margaret turned a smiling face towards her; "that you have a talent for drawing figures, witness those I saw at

Teesdale last week; that you know enough German to be able to read an easy book quite pleasantly to yourself; and, finally, are better read than nine out of ten of the young ladies I meet with."

"Am I really?" said Margaret, surprised, for she did not know it. "Certainly," she added, after a long pause, "Papa and Mamma have done all they possibly could for us, and have often, I believe, deprived themselves of many comforts on our account. I think that half-year at school did wonders for me. It showed me how I might improve myself, and in what I was most deficient."

Mrs. Asheton left Margaret for a little while in the afternoon, to give her the opportunity of thinking over quietly all they had been saying. If she was inclined to offer herself to Lady North, no time must be lost, and Mrs. Asheton intended, should this be the case, to write to her aunt by that night's post.

Margaret did decide in favour of the plan, provided she should still like the idea when she had heard more particulars from Lady North, and provided her parents would give their consent to her leaving them. Mrs. Asheton thought it far from improbable that they would do so. She knew that Captain Stourton had stated facts and used expressions when conversing with her husband, and also indeed with herself, which had made them both fear some such step as that which Margaret now contemplated must soon be necessary.

"I will try and spend some part of Friday with you," she said, when Margaret was saying "Good-bye." "I hope by that time I shall have heard many more particulars. I shall make the fullest inquiries in my letters to-night, and you will have had two days for thinking and talking over what will, I know, require a great deal of both, before you can *really* say whether it is to be 'yes' or 'no.' Good-bye then, dear, once more; you deserve to do well, if ever a good child did;" and with these words they parted.

It is needless to attempt to describe all the contending feelings which occupied the minds of the family at the cottage, when on her return home Margaret explained why Mrs. Asheton had wanted to see her. Margaret was but twenty-two, she had been very little from home, and had always been cared for tenderly. Northcourt was in a distant county, at least two hundred miles from Teesdale. The life of a governess was one of which she had never had any experience. She had never seen any of the North family, never even heard of them before, for Mrs. Asheton was only slightly acquainted with Lady North herself; though what little she had seen of her, she told Margaret she very much liked.

But still the opportunity which now offered was not one to be thrown away; for indeed Mrs. Asheton's conjecture was a right one, and Margaret found that although they had said but little either to herself or to her sisters on the subject, her parents

felt an increasing difficulty in meeting the daily expenses, and paying off what they already owed. The doctor had told Mrs. Stourton that he feared worry of mind from some cause or other (easily guessed at by *her*) was in no small degree the cause of her husband's failing health. Mrs. Asheton came to Teesdale, as she had promised, and she brought with her letters from Lady North and from Mrs. Lyndsey.

Both expressed themselves delighted with all she had told them of Margaret. Lady North wrote at considerable length, for there was little time for the passing and re-passing of letters, as she was extremely anxious to leave England at the beginning of the week after the next with her son, Sir Roger North, and his invalid sister.

Enclosed in her letter to Mrs. Asheton was one for Margaret, in which, after speaking of the high opinion she had of both Mr. and Mrs. Asheton as judges of character, capability, &c., she proceeded to promise that if Margaret consented to come to Northcourt, every thing should be arranged there in the way most likely to conduce to her comfort and happiness.

"Of course," Lady North added, "I do feel that it will be no small trial to one so young as you are, and one, too, who has hitherto been accustomed to live in a happy home circle, to come to such a very quiet place as this must necessarily be, while I am away. Excepting our Clergyman's family, (with whom we are very inti-

mate,) we have few neighbours, but I hope one of my aunts will often be at Northcourt, which will break the monotony of your life a little. I hear you are naturally cheerful, and have good health and strength, and that will, I hope, be very much in favour of your keeping in good spirits; besides, I really think you will find my three children pleasant little companions. They are lively, and happy in disposition, and I feel a strong conviction that they will soon be fond of you."

This was not all the letter contained; indeed there was one other item of special importance—which was, that Lady North offered Miss Stourton a hundred pounds a year.

A hundred pounds! It seemed immense to Margaret, far beyond her deserts. But Mrs. Asheton assured her that under the circumstances it was not too much.

"You are to be left alone," she said, "you are to be in a dull place, you are to go all in a hurry; why you want the thought of your enormous gains to keep up your courage! Lady North is most anxious to secure you, that is very evident, and she is perfectly aware that it would be useless to expect to do so, unless she made you an offer well worth your accepting."

CHAPTER IV.

"The voices of my home! I hear them still."

IT was a rainy, misty morning when Margaret looked out of her window at seven o'clock. Her luggage was all ready; Mr. Asheton would call for her in his carriage in less than half an hour: she was putting on her bonnet, for she thought she would complete every thing, so as to have that half-hour uninterrupted; but she felt little able, after all, to be quiet. If she sat down to talk she was perpetually on the point of bursting into a fit of crying. It was the same with the rest of the family: very difficult had it been to her parents to make up their minds to the step Margaret was now taking, but at length they had agreed that, as the opportunity presented itself unsought on their part, and as Margaret had so fully made up her own mind to take it, she should be allowed to do so. Still it must be with the understanding that, highly as they appreciated the motives which would induce her to bear with patience and cheerfulness much toil and hardness, they would not permit her to remain at Northcourt unless she found she could be happy there, and was always treated with kindness and consideration.

None of them knew how to bear the parting with composure. It was quite fortunate when, something having been forgotten, a little hurry and difficulty was the consequence, and somehow or other they became quite cheerful till the approaching sound of carriage wheels caught their ears: then there were no more words, for each felt a choking sensation in the throat. Mr. Asheton had been delayed, no time must be lost, or they would not catch the train. In two minutes more Margaret was driving down the village street. She could scarcely believe she was actually by her own consent leaving home, and going miles away into a new untried world.

Mr. Asheton, the kindest of friends, did not interrupt her grief. He spent some minutes in arranging the cloaks and other things which had been put somewhat hastily into the carriage; and he took out his pocket-book to make some memoranda, and looked out of the window; then at last he said, "By-the-bye, Margaret, I've a note for you from my wife; here it is. The children sent you heaps of loves, too."

Margaret took the note; she could have kissed it, it was so kind. Perhaps no one who has not been in a somewhat similar situation can understand the feeling of desolation which had crept over her, or which made that little note seem of priceless value in her eyes. But it was so full of feeling and sympathy, and yet so cheering, that it seemed to recall her hopes and courage, and before

she reached the station she had begun to question with herself whether she were not unreasonable to feel so very unhappy, and she determined that, on the contrary, she would at once begin to be as happy as she fully intended to be at Northcourt. She began imagining, for the twentieth time, the first evening there, the first meeting with the children, and the first attempts at teaching; but the thing she oftenest thought of, and that rather with dread, was her interview with Lady North.

It had been arranged that she should stay two or three days in London, at Mrs. Lyndsey's, where Lady North would see her.

The journey was satisfactorily over, and Margaret and Mr. Asheton were driving away from the Paddington station in Mrs. Lyndsey's comfortable carriage at half-past four. The lamps were being lighted, the evening was foggy, and Margaret did not see much of London on this her first night there. Her heart beat fast when the carriage drew up at Mrs. Lyndsey's door, and faster still as she entered the drawing-room. It was a very cold evening. A bright fire was burning in the low ample grate, but the room was rather dark, there being no other light than that which the fire gave. A lady came from the next room almost immediately, and shaking hands with Mr. Asheton, exclaimed, "What a miserable day you have had for your journey, Edward!" and then, as Mr. Asheton turned to present Margaret to her, she bowed, and

said, "You must be cold, pray come nearer the fire."

Margaret felt afraid of Mrs. Lyndsey the first moment she saw her, although the room was too dark for her to distinguish her features well.

Mr. Asheton and Mrs. Lyndsey were soon engaged in talking about various acquaintances, and in discussing and relating varieties of things, of which Margaret knew nothing; and she became absorbed in her own thoughts. She wondered what they were doing at home; she knew they must be thinking of her. Oh, how strange it felt to be there, in that London drawing-room! the deep roaring sound outside; the long railway journey. Yes, in London she was: it was not a dream.

A servant brought in lights and tea; and Mrs. Lyndsey "hoped Miss Stourton would take a cup of tea?" which Margaret was indeed very glad to do, for she was beginning to feel rather exhausted, not having felt any inclination to eat on the journey.

"Tell Jones to come to me when I ring," said Mrs. Lyndsey to the servant.

"Should you like my maid to show you to your room, Miss Stourton?" she added, soon after. "Perhaps you will be glad to rest a little while before dinner: we dine at seven; we shall have two or three friends with us, but quite a quiet party."

"I dare say you will be very glad to rest after all you have done to-day," said Mr. Asheton.

Margaret was only too ready to say she should: she had been longing to leave the room for the last quarter of an hour. Mrs. Lyndsey rang the bell, and Mrs. Jones made her appearance.

"Are Miss Stourton's things carried up, and is her room ready?" asked Mrs. Lyndsey; to which Mrs. Jones replying in the affirmative, she was requested to show Margaret the way up stairs. How delightful it was to shut her door and be alone! she even locked it, that she might feel doubly alone with her own thoughts.

There was a nice cheerful fire, which looked warm and friendly; and, her bonnet and shawl laid aside, she threw herself into the arm-chair, and was quite frightened when, after a while suddenly recollecting herself, she thought how long she had sat there without having made any preparations for dinner.

Looking at her watch, she found, however, that she had more than half an hour left, which was a great relief to her mind, as she wanted to be down in good time. She had very nearly completed her preparations, when she heard a knock at her door, which she hastened to unfasten. She was glad to admit a very good-natured looking housemaid, instead of the somewhat awful Mrs. Jones. The housemaid brought her a letter which had come by the evening post, and assisted her in finishing her toilet. The letter was from Lady North, who said she much regretted having been obliged to be so uncertain about her plans, and that she now found

she could not be in London till the morning after the next.

Margaret went down into the drawing-room, where she found only Mr. Asheton, who was enjoying a little comfortable idleness, and she had a nice talk with him. She told him of Lady North's note, and he said he hoped now she would have time to see something of London, and they made some plans accordingly. The guests soon after arrived—a Mr. Clifford, Sir Digby Fletcher, Lord Cope, and Mr. and Mrs. Towning.

Mr. Lyndsey came in late, and did not appear till just as dinner was announced. Margaret found the dinner-time pass very pleasantly; there was so much agreeable conversation. Her neighbour on the right, Mr. Clifford, finding that she had not been in London before, began telling her of various things which he considered most worth her seeing. If she had only come to town for a few days, he supposed it to be her intention to see as much as she could in that time.

She said it was her wish to do so, but that she feared she should not manage a great deal, but Mr. Asheton (she told him) had promised to take her to one or two places the next day. Mr. Clifford, who appeared to be on very intimate terms with the Lyndseys, turned towards Mrs. Lyndsey, and said, "I have been persuading Miss Stourton to leave out some of the London sights which it is the fashion to go to see, and as she tells me her time here is limited, I recommend

her to visit ——— and ——— at all events," naming a few places at considerable distances from each other, and to which she could not be admitted without tickets. You know," he continued, "that there need be no difficulty, as I can procure you cards and orders, which I shall have great pleasure in sending for Miss Stourton's use if you will allow me to do so."

Mr. Clifford was very fond of talking, and liked making himself important. He was a well-informed man, and he found Margaret an excellent listener. He liked her bright quickness of comprehension, and the interest she showed in his explanations. In short, he had taken quite a fancy to her, and was anxious that she should see whatever he considered most interesting. But he had a way of taking an idea into his head, and acting upon it, that was sometimes very annoying, and had more than once led people into difficulties.

Margaret thought she had said quite enough to make any one understand that, although she hoped to see something of London, her time was scarcely her own, and that she knew she could only depend upon Mr. Asheton to take her out a little; but Mr. Clifford had perhaps naturally enough concluded her to be paying an ordinary visit to Mrs. Lyndsey, and fancied that her apparent scrupulousness arose from her not knowing what difficulties there might be in the way of procuring cards of admission, &c. Mrs. Lyndsey replied to his offers by rather a surprised doubtful

look, first at him, then at Margaret, who blushed crimson, and before she could think how to exonerate herself, Mrs. Lyndsey said,

"Oh, thank you; I am afraid Miss Stourton will hardly find she is able to avail herself of your kindness, but—"

"No," said Margaret; "indeed I fear it will be quite impossible, thank you, but at the same time I am extremely obliged to you."

Mr. Clifford, who never liked being thwarted, looked somewhat annoyed and surprised. He could not make out the meaning either of Margaret's or Mrs. Lyndsey's manner. He rather thought he had reason to feel offended. He replied very curtly to Margaret's expressions of gratitude, and said no more for a while. She felt excessively annoyed, and thought Mrs. Lyndsey's manner had been far from kind or considerate, and that had she possessed either benevolence or tact, she would have replied very differently. In fact, Margaret thought a great deal more of the misconception under which Mr. Clifford had been than was necessary, or than he did himself. He forgot all about it a few minutes afterwards while eating some chestnuts, which, being particularly hot, burnt his mouth. But Margaret had never till now experienced the sort of feelings which then vexed her.

"This is my first initiation into what governesses have to go through," she said to herself. "Why did I not say, I cannot make the plans you pro-

pose, for I am not here for the sake of seeing London, and otherwise amusing myself, but simply because I have offered myself as governess to Lady North's children, and it suits Lady North to see me here? And yet, why should I explain all this to Mr. Clifford? After all, it is no concern of his, what I am or what I am not. How foolish I am to care for what I could not well avoid, and certainly is no fault! No, I determined I would not allow feelings of this kind to take any hold of me, and I will, if it be possible, keep my resolution. No doubt this little trial has been permitted for my good," she thought, soon afterwards, "and I have been proud and wrong." It was the idea that Mrs. Lyndsey believed her to have been giving Mr. Clifford an erroneous impression regarding herself that was most hard to bear.

In the evening she was a good deal surprised by Mrs. Lyndsey's asking her in a pleasant manner whether, if really not too much tired by her long journey, she would give them a little music. She consented immediately, and sang by heart a very pretty song, Mrs. Asheton's great favourite, which delighted several of the party. She was asked if she would sing it again as it was very short, and she complied so good-naturedly that she was very warmly thanked. Her voice was particularly strong that evening and was naturally very sweet, which in a great degree compensated for the want of much regular instruction, a want which Lord Cope's very cultivated ear easily detected. He

sang next, accompanied by Mrs. Towning, and it was a great treat to Margaret to hear him. Afterwards, at his own request, he sang a duet with her. It was one very familiar to her, and she much enjoyed singing it with him, although feeling very shy. The rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough, but Margaret, who felt very tired, was not sorry when it was over, and she was once more in her snug little room, finding fault with herself for her folly about Mr. Clifford, and wondering at the new sort of feelings she had experienced.

The next morning Mr. Asheton went out early, as he had business to attend to; but he and Mrs. Lyndsey previously arranged that she should take Margaret out with her in the afternoon, and meet him in the city, when he could take her to see St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. So Margaret spent part of the morning in writing letters, and directly after luncheon they went out.

Mrs. Lyndsey spoke but little, and Margaret was too much afraid of her to say much; besides which, driving through the crowded streets was quite sufficient occupation for her without talking. She longed, however, to explain the annoyance of the previous evening, and yet she did not know how to begin, when to her no small astonishment Mrs. Lyndsey herself referred to it.

"I much regret that it was not possible for me to accept Mr. Clifford's offer of cards of admission last night, but I understood you would only be

here a day or two; and until you mentioned it late in the evening after he was gone, I was not aware that you had heard from Lady North what day she could come."

Margaret now saw that it was Mrs. Lyndsey's *manner* which she had mistaken; she thanked her, and then went on to say how strange it must have appeared that she should not have made Mr. Clifford understand how she was situated. But she was thrown back again by the tone in which Mrs. Lyndsey said she did not remember if this had occurred to her or not, at the time; at all events it did not signify, "she was well aware of Mr. Clifford's way of settling things according to his own notions for other people."

Mrs. Lyndsey had naturally a cold, short manner, and was always reserved with people she did not know well, and especially young people. Margaret now determined that what had happened should be a lesson to her for the future. She felt how being placed in different circumstances, might make a different sort of watchfulness necessary, for a peculiar position might bring liabilities to misunderstandings, peculiar to itself.

If she had not all the while had the recollection in her own mind that she was at that dinner-table, not simply as a guest, but because it happened to be convenient to Lady North that she would meet her in London, to make the final arrangements before becoming her *governess*, her mind would have been in a calmer state; she would not have

been so easily roused by a little mistake to positive feelings of annoyance; and she began to feel grateful for the lesson she had received, although quite humbled to think how so light a thing had led her into what she had felt to be wrong and foolish.

She was delighted with all she saw in London; of course the time of year was not the most favourable for sight-seeing, but still London in itself was wonderful and interesting to her.

She was very glad to have letters the next morning from home, and also one from Mrs. Asheton; which seemed like a sort of introduction to Lady North, whose arrival she was expecting at eleven o'clock.

She was sitting in the little back drawing-room when she heard a carriage stop, and a knock at the door, and shortly afterwards, voices in the hall. Should she go up to her own room? No, she had determined to stay just where she was, disliking immensely the idea of being "sent for." She heard a young voice which she liked, say, "Shall I bring this bag up, Mother?" and she liked the lady's voice which replied.

That must be Sir Roger North and his mother: Margaret was so glad he was with her, she might gain some idea of what her pupils would be like from seeing him. She sat quite still; they were coming up stairs: of course the larger drawing-room door would open directly; but no! instead of that door, the one into the room where she was

was opened quickly, and a lady entered, followed by a servant with cloaks and parcels, and immediately after by a young gentleman.

Margaret instantly rose and bowed slightly; the lady, who seemed to be very short-sighted, also bowed, and then rather hesitatingly said, "Have I the pleasure of speaking to Miss Stourton?" Margaret answered in the affirmative, and the lady shook hands with her. The young man whom Lady North introduced as her son went to the fire, warmed his hands, looked about the room, and from time to time, rather scrutinizingly, at Margaret. Lady North said a few common-places, asked Margaret if she knew whether Mrs. Lyndsey was at home, and then talked to Sir Roger about some arrangements; and said she thought she would go up stairs and take off her bonnet and shawl, when Mrs. Lyndsey appeared, and Lady North left the room with her. Margaret saw that her companion looked very gentleman-like, rather shy, and very young, apparently about eighteen, which she had heard he was. So she began to speak to him: he replied very readily, and they were soon capital friends, laughing and talking quite as if they had met many times before.

When Lady North and her aunt came down into the other room, Margaret heard them talking in rather low tones, and she began to be a little absent; she fancied Mrs. Lyndsey might be telling Lady North what she thought of her, and she could not help wishing to have her own interview over.

Whatever the subject of conversation might have been, Lady North looked extremely pleasant when she came and asked her son what he would do about going to some shops, and whether he wished to go out before luncheon. He said he should go out directly, leaving it uncertain what time he returned; so after a little more settling of plans he followed his mother into the next room again, to whisper his decided approbation of Margaret, and to say that, in fact, had he known what she would be like, he much doubted whether he should have consented to go abroad. His mother laughed at him, and he left her. Then she came into the small drawing-room, and the important talk began, but it did not last long, for every thing seemed satisfactory, and Margaret felt as if all was bright before her when she laid her head on her pillow that night, after a very agreeable evening, during which she had learned a great deal about her future pupils, and had made sufficient acquaintance with their mother to feel that she could write to her about them with ease and confidence.

CHAPTER V.

"A wise traveller goeth on cheerily
Through fair weather or foul."

M. F. Tupper.

ON the following Friday Margaret left London for Northcourt. Mrs. Lyndsey's carriage took her to the station, and she was recommended to the care of the guard of the train, who was well known to Lady North. He put her into a carriage in which there were two ladies, who were going farther than she was, so she would be secure of companions for the whole of her journey. These two ladies were in the farther compartment of the carriage; and as they did not particularly prepossess Margaret, she contented herself with feeling that they were all that was needed in the way of chaperones, without it being necessary for her to sit nearer to them. At the next station another lady got in, and soon after a gentleman. The gentleman seemed to be greatly interested in the morning paper, behind which he hid his face. After a while, another gentleman got in, who was soon deep in an argument with the lady opposite to him, on some much talked-of questions of the day. The lady maintained her own views with

such peculiar phrases and wonderful anecdotes, by way of examples, that Margaret was extremely amused, and suddenly the newspaper-reading gentleman looked out from behind his paper with so droll an expression of half-angry contempt and surprise, and relaxed into such a bright smile the instant after, as he observed Margaret's face, which she was endeavouring to keep composed, that she could not help laughing: whereupon the other lady and gentleman looked at her with unbounded disgust, and did not speak again for some time. Margaret became quite grave, and felt rather shocked at herself.

The newspaper reader proceeded soon after to cut it with a penknife, which he took from his pocket, and then, handing one half to his next neighbour, he offered the other to Margaret. She took it, and was soon much interested in an article that touched upon some matters which she had heard discussed at Mrs. Lyndsey's, the evening before. The other gentleman and lady now left the train, and Margaret's companion, after studying for some time a little pamphlet he had with him, began to talk, and very agreeably, explaining some of the things mentioned in the paper, and showing considerable knowledge and originality, and acquaintance with all sorts of subjects. He left the train at the station before the one at which Margaret was to stop, and, taking off his hat, bowed his good morning.

A few moments after she saw something white

sticking up between the cushion and the side of the seat which the gentleman had occupied, and found it to be the little penknife with which he had cut the paper. The train was already past the platform; she was too late to give it to its owner, so she put it into her bag, wondering whether she should ever have an opportunity of returning it to him. Arrived at Hintry Station, she got out of the carriage with her cloaks and bag, when the guard came to tell her that her luggage was all right, and in the care of a servant from Northcourt, to whom he conducted her. So she was soon on her way to her new home.

After half an hour's drive they reached a small scattered village of pretty cottages, most of them detached and standing in gardens. Turning a corner, the carriage passed by a small and very pretty old church, then by a lodge, and through its gates; and, crossing an extensive and well-wooded park, finally stopped before the door of Northcourt House. Three children with hoops were standing under a tree at a little distance on the side of a broad garden walk, and as Margaret stepped from the carriage she saw them scamper across the grass as fast as their legs could carry them towards the back of the house. On entering, Margaret was at once conducted upstairs, and along a gallery, to a pretty room which looked very comfortable, and from which she could see the part of the park she had just crossed, and also, from a side window, a terraced garden. Glancing round, the books in

their shelves, a pair of globes, some maps on the wall, &c., made her guess she was in the school-room; but before she had time for further observations, a knock at a door she had not observed was followed by the entrance of a kind pleasant-looking person, who with a slight curtsey informed her that she was Mrs. Watson, the nurse, and that she came to ask how Miss Stourton felt after her journey. Margaret thanked her, and told her she did not feel at all tired; and Mrs. Watson then proposed showing her to her room, which was next to the school-room. The nursery, in which Mrs. Watson always sat, was on the other side of Margaret's room, and another door led to "the young ladies' room," so "Miss Stourton need not feel in the least lonely," the nurse said. Margaret inquired how soon the children would come in.

"Very shortly, Ma'am," Mrs. Watson replied. "They feel rather shy, poor little dears," she added, "but I don't think they will any longer when they have seen you, Ma'am."

"I hope not," said Margaret.

"I'm sure they won't," said the nurse, emphatically.

When Margaret went back into the school-room a quarter of an hour afterwards, she found the little girls and their brother on the wide window-seat, Maude sitting in the corner, and the others standing. They immediately got down and shook hands with her.

"What a nice old window and window-seat this is!" said Margaret. "Is it your favourite place?"

"Yes, I think it is," said Maude, the eldest of the little girls.

"Well, I think you are quite right, and I must stand up there too, in order to see the church tower better between the trees. How pretty it looks, even though the leaves are all gone! This must be a very pretty view in the summer time."

"If you come this side," said Oliver, "you can see a little bit of the lake, and the top of the boat-house."

"Yes, and from this end you can see Northwood, too," said Fanny.

Margaret looked at all the points of view the children wished her to observe, and soon found plenty to ask about, and very willing answerers. She discovered that Milward Grange was four miles off, and the parsonage less than a quarter of a mile. That Mr. Shirley, the clergyman, had several children, who were great friends of the Norths: that the family at Milward consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Nugent, Miss Maria Nugent, and Mr. Hugh Nugent; and she also acquired a great deal of information about walks in woods, walks by the lake, and good places for pic-nics in the summer time. Mrs. Watson came to know at what hour tea should be brought in, and it was decided to have it at once. A neat little school-room maid appeared, and tea was soon ready; and as Margaret and her pupils sat round the table, she really felt so happy with them that she almost wondered

why she should ever have felt any nervousness or dread of what she was undertaking.

The evening passed cheerfully. There were plenty of books, puzzles, prints, &c., and Oliver, who was evidently ingenious, occupied himself very happily with a knife and tools and some pieces of wood. Maude took several books from a book-case and brought them to Margaret, telling her at the same time that they belonged to a London circulating library, to which Lady North subscribed, and from which Margaret could order any other books in exchange whenever she liked to do so. She thought the goodly heap before her would last some time, and finding among it a volume she had long wanted to see, said she would read that first, begging Maude to put the rest back again for the present.

The following day lessons were begun in a small way, just to give Margaret an idea of her pupils' attainments, and it being Saturday, the afternoon was a complete holiday. The children took her to see their gardens, their rabbits, their doves, and favourite haunts. Sunday did seem a very new sort of Sunday to her, when she walked across the park and entered the little church, and saw only strange faces around her. The children were quiet and attentive, and Mr. Shirley seemed to be a good earnest clergyman.

The whole service had a solemnity and heart in it, for which Margaret was very grateful. She never [illegible] more in earnest herself, or more anxious for

help and guidance. The Milward family sometimes came to church at Northleigh, and after service it appeared that some of them were there on this day. Miss Nugent came out quickly to meet the Norths, upon whom she bestowed kisses and extremely affectionate expressions of interest, while she stared at Margaret very rudely.

"Good-bye, dears, good-bye," she said, "I am coming very soon to see you. I have a great deal to tell you, and you must be so dull, too, all alone;" and she ran off to join her companions, who were already in the carriage.

"We ain't dull, though—at least, not very," said Oliver, bluntly, as he walked along by Margaret's side.

"Well," she said, "we will all try not to feel so, though no doubt you will miss your mother and brother and sister a good deal."

"Yes, we do," said Fanny, "only we are not so dull in the way Maria Nugent means. She is always dull, Emily says, unless there are a great many people staying at Milward; that is what she means."

"Oh! I understand," said Margaret, "and I am very glad you don't feel dull in that way."

"I like people to come to stay with us, though, when mamma is at home," said Fanny.

"Yes, and so do I," said Maude, "when I know them well; but I think I like it best when there is no one excepting Aunt Hetty, or some one I know as well as I do her."

'Aunt Hetty' was Lady Harriett Colvin, a

younger sister of Lady North's mother, and not much older than Lady North herself. Her husband was a great invalid, generally requiring her constant unceasing attention. Sometimes, however, she was able to leave him to pay a visit of a day or two to Northcourt, where her arrival was always hailed with delight; but she never went far from home. Mr. Colvin had been less well than usual lately, so there seemed to be little chance of her driving over at present. All these particulars were duly made known to Margaret.

The next day brought Mrs. Shirley to call upon Margaret and the children. She sent up the servant with her name first, to the school-room, to know "whether Miss Stourton would like to see her?" There were no lessons going on at the time, but had there been, they would have been stopped of course on such an occasion.

Margaret said "Yes," and Mrs. Shirley came up stairs. She had a little boy with her five years old, of whom Maude and Fanny quickly took possession, and made him very happy. Oliver was out riding, for he went three times a week to learn Latin with Mr. Shirley, and often rode with him in the afternoons. The parish, though small, was scattered, and a good deal of Mr. Shirley's parochial visiting was to farm-houses and cottages at a distance from each other, and on these parochializing journeys Oliver often accompanied him. Mr. Shirley's eldest boy was the same age as Oliver, and his constant companion.

Margaret and Mrs. Shirley got on very well indeed, and the visit was altogether a pleasant one to Margaret, who most cordially accepted Mrs. Shirley's invitation to call at the Rectory whenever she felt inclined to do so. Lady North, who had known Mrs. Shirley all her life, and to whom she was almost like a sister, had particularly mentioned Margaret to her, and had also prepared Margaret to find in her a kind and helpful friend.

Towards the end of the week, Margaret and the children were walking at some distance from the house, when a cavalcade of people appeared coming towards them.

"Hollo!" exclaimed Oliver; "here are Maria Nugent and a whole set of people with her. I dare say they were coming to see us."

"We need not go back, though, need we, Miss Stourton?" asked Maude.

"I really don't know, dear, yet," said Margaret. "I suppose we shall hear what they are going to do when they meet us."

On perceiving the children, Miss Nugent whipped on her ponies, and came up with them, and said in a loud voice—

"Oh, we are such a party! and we are going to see the house; what a pity you are not at home! I thought you would be somewhere in the garden walk, most likely."

Several gentlemen and two ladies on horseback had come up by this time, and one of the former nodded to the children, and, putting his glass to

his eye, contemplated Margaret very coolly; and then turning to another near him, said rather low, "A new governess, rather nice-looking, too."

"Eh! oh, indeed," said the other, "I thought it must be one of the family, or, I mean, some relation."

"Ha! ha! how disappointed you are, Max!"

"Not in the least," said Max, looking slightly disgusted.

The conversation between Miss Nugent and the children ended by her turning abruptly to Margaret, and saying, "I suppose you don't wish the Miss Norths to go home yet?"

"We had intended going as far as Bruton," replied Margaret; "but I have no objection," she added, "to their returning home."

"Oh, no, on no account; I know every inch of the house; it does not signify in the least. Good morning; good-bye, Maude; *au revoir*." And off she drove at a scampering pace.

The gentleman called Max, whose little conversation with young Nugent Margaret had unintentionally overheard, lifted his hat as he passed, and the riders were soon cantering after the little carriage.

"I am so glad; I was so afraid you would go back, Miss Stourton," said Oliver.

"And so were we," said both the girls.

"I wonder who those people were," said Maude. "I don't think I ever saw any of them before."

"Oh, I have," said Oliver. "I have seen two

of the gentlemen—out hunting; last year. I mean. I know one was Mr. Maxwell, but I don't remember the name of the other."

"Maxwell!" said Margaret. "was there a Mr. Maxwell among them!"

"Yes, he has a moustache; did not you see him!"

"No, I did not."

"Do you know him!"

"A little; that is, I have met him at dinner. if it is the same Mr. Maxwell I mean."

"Oh, then, that was why he bowed," said Maude, "when none of the others did."

"Did he!" said Margaret, "I did not observe that."

Having done their various errands at Bruton, and laid in a store of paper, string, tin tacks, and various other articles procurable at the one shop there, which was, however, by no means a bad one, they turned homeward; the children delighted that they had prevailed on Margaret to make a small purchase by way of patronizing the shop.

They found Mrs. Watson and the housekeeper both talking in the gallery when they went in, and evidently a good deal put out in consequence of the "airs" which Miss Nugent and some of the party had given themselves.

"How long have they been gone!" asked Fanny.

"About a quarter of an hour," replied Mrs. Baillie.

"Oh, what a comfort that we have missed them!"

"What did you say, Fanny?" asked Margaret, half gravely.

Fanny coloured. "Yes, I know," she said, "but then, Miss Stourton, it is such a bore."

"Worse and worse, Fanny."

"Oh, well, I won't then," she said, as she looked up with a smile at Margaret, and went to take off her walking things; "but I cannot be sorry we were not at home, at all events," she added, aside.

A few days after this, Miss Nugent arrived in time for luncheon, which was dinner, of course, to Margaret and her pupils. She had kindly come to enliven them, and to astonish them by the details of her first season in London, and with a sight of her chains, bracelets, lockets, and charms, which she wore in greater profusion than ever, since she "came out." When she was alone with Maude, she took the opportunity of inquiring how she liked Miss Stourton.

"Very much," said Maude.

"Hem," said Maria: and after a momentary pause—"she looks like a lady, but she did not appear very civil when I met you the other day. where does she come from?"

Maude could tell Maria very little about Margaret; she did just know that she had lived at a place called Teesdale.

The luncheon bell ringing, they went down

stairs, Miss Nugent's chains and bracelets rattling very loud as she walked. She ignored Margaret a good deal. But there was something that rather abashed her in Margaret's quiet self-possession and perfect ease of manner; and in the happy laughing way in which she talked, or answered her remarks. However, Maria was soon herself again, and turning more decidedly to Maude and Fanny, she began pouring into their ears long stories of balls, concerts, morning parties and dinner-parties, to which she had been, at all of which apparently she had played a very important part.

The immense number of partners she had never been able to find time to dance with, was surprising, so was the number of bonnets she had been obliged to buy. "Hugh used to say he thought young ladies shockingly extravagant," she said; "but he soon saw that it was positively necessary for me, as I went out so much, to dress well, and that, you know, cannot be done without plenty of money. The drawing-room was frightfully expensive, and a great bore too!"

"Was it really?" said Margaret, "I should have thought it must be amusing, and interesting too."

"O yes; but when one is used to the kind of thing, one ceases to be interested as one might be by novelties to which one was unaccustomed. The birth-day is a grandish sight. But, oh! the London balls; they *are* charming! The music makes dancing perfection. I am perfectly insane, you know, about music, and so are some of my pet

in here," Margaret continued; saying which, she rose and left the room herself.

Miss Nugent went out into the gallery.

"Max won't come up," Margaret heard Mr. Nugent say; "he talks about intrusions, and not knowing the family, and a lot more nonsense."

Margaret heard no more, but these words had been said very loud. It was, however, soon evident that the speaker was not coming into the school-room, so she returned there.

"They are riding away," said Fanny, who was standing on the window-seat.

Miss Nugent, looking angry and haughty, soon came back into the room.

"Will you order my carriage, please, Fanny?" she said. Fanny left the room to give the order, and finding Maude in the hall ready for battledore and shuttlecock, stayed to play with her.

"It was *impossible*," began Miss Nugent, "that I could be prepared for this extraordinary change. Considering we are so well acquainted, so extremely intimate, indeed, with the North family; I must say I think it most absurd."

"I was really exceedingly sorry to annoy you," replied Margaret; "but placed as I am here, I am obliged to act on my own responsibility sometimes, and I cannot help still hoping you will see that I have not been wrong in this instance."

"I do not think it *at all* likely," answered Miss Nugent. "I have never before been accused of acting improperly."

The servant announced the carriage; and Maria, bowing in what she intended to be a most freezing manner, left the room.

No sooner was she gone than Margaret felt as if in some way or other she might have managed better. Had she been making "much ado about nothing?" or had she only done the right thing? It was evident that Miss Nugent and her brother were taking advantage of her position, to behave in a way in which they would not have behaved under any other circumstances; and there was a degree of impertinence in Miss Nugent's manner which Margaret did not choose to bear very patiently. Besides which, Lady North had given her clearly to understand, that although she wished to continue on terms of easy acquaintance with the Nugent family, as they had been neighbours for many years, she had no wish at all for an increase of intimacy, and did not altogether like the children to see as much of them as they did; but that owing to Miss Nugent's apparently fancying them very much, and paying such constant visits, it was very difficult to avoid it. Lady North had gone so far as to say: "I would rather discourage than encourage further intimacy." Notwithstanding these recollections, Margaret felt as if she had done an unprecedented thing, and she got quite uncomfortable about it. She longed for some one to whom she could detail the whole affair.

Lady North had advised her to consult Mrs. Watson in any difficulty. "You will find her un-

usually sensible and clear-judging," she said, "and her mind is much above what you would expect to find in persons in her station. She knows my wishes and feelings on most subjects very well, from having lived so many years with me."

"Mrs. Watson," said Margaret, that evening, "I want to ask your opinion. Do you think I should have been right had I allowed Mr. Nugent and a friend of his to come up into the school-room, even though his sister was there?"

"No, Ma'am, I think, certainly not; and if I may take such a liberty, I should advise you not to have too much to do with that family. My Lady does not wish it, I think, and I don't believe Sir Roger approves particularly of Mr. Nugent. They are for ever coming here, whether they are asked or no."

"But Mr. Nugent has often been into the school-room, has he not?" asked Margaret.

"What, Ma'am? only when either Sir Roger or Master Oliver have asked him, and that is a long time ago. I am quite certain my lady would extremely dislike it; and besides, Ma'am, our last governess was more than twice your age, which makes a difference."

Margaret was immensely relieved, and felt her confidence in herself strengthening again.

CHAPTER VI.

"Les sentiments graves et les occupations sérieuses préparent singulièrement à goûter les amusements simples."

MAD. GUIZOT.

IT is easy to imagine how anxiously the little party at Teesdale watched for letters from Margaret. Every sentence she wrote was read, and re-read, and conned over by the family, to ascertain as far as possible what her real feelings were; whether she was only making the best of things by taking a cheerful tone in writing, or was really happy and comfortable, and beginning to feel as much at home as she described herself to be.

She wrote the fullest details about every thing at Northcourt, describing most minutely the style of the house both inside and out, and more especially the rooms appropriated to her own use; also the gardens and surrounding country, neglecting nothing which she thought would interest her family, and make them able to realize as perfectly as they could, without having really seen it, the general aspect of all about her. Of the children, too, she wrote a full description; though, as she told Lucy,

she felt she should have more to say about them when she had been longer with them. But her impression of their characters and dispositions was decidedly favourable.

Northcourt was a very nice place. The house stood on a gentle slope, backed by woods. The park was very pretty; there was great variety in the shape of the ground, and the timber was fine. In some parts there were magnificent groups of trees, which Margaret, who was a true lover of nature, was never tired of admiring. She looked forward with pleasure to seeing them in full leaf, as also the abundant hawthorns, for which Northcourt park was so famous, decked in their spring garb of pink and white blossoms. There had once been a grove on the left side of the house, but many of the trees had died, and what remained were knarled and broken, and exhibited marks of great age. The rooks, however, still made their nests among the branches, for they preferred their ancestral homes to the more modern ones offered by the younger trees; and still year by year young broods were hatched and reared, though many a nest was hurled ruthlessly to the earth when the wind tried too roughly the strength of the old tree tops.

A gallery, the walls of which were hung with a fine collection of pictures, ran the whole length of the left side of the house. A charming place it was for exercise in wet weather. And there was a good library well filled with books; some of them very rare, and possessing particular interest for Mar-

garet, who was always inclined to care for what was not common, and who was a great lover of antiquity.

Her home letters conveyed the idea that she was in excellent spirits, which in fact was really the case; for there was so much in her new position to occupy her, to call forth all her powers of mind and thought, and to awaken new interests, that she certainly felt very far from unhappy; and her mother would have been perfectly satisfied could she but have seen the bright face with which Margaret entered the school-room on the morning of the day fortnight after her arrival at Northcourt, or heard the cheerful, playful tone in which she spoke to Oliver, who was looking rather doleful over a longer bit of Latin than was usually given him as a lesson. Her help soon brought a different expression to his face, and he went hopefully to work with a quiet, satisfied look at her, as he curled himself up in his corner on the old-fashioned sofa.

The country around Northcourt was somewhat wild, and there were high breezy hills within easy distance. The children were charmed to find that Margaret enjoyed walking, and was not at all afraid of mud, and could get through a gap in a hedge as well as they could. She allowed them to show her walks of their own choosing sometimes, and this was a great amusement to them. She found it a little puzzling now and then to know exactly where to draw the line between indulgence

and the strictness required to maintain due discipline in the school-room; but in this difficulty she felt that experience must be her guide, and that she must be on the watch to learn from it how best to act as circumstances presented themselves. Once or twice she overheard little scraps of conversation from the children, such as the following:

"Miss Blake never would let us, you know."

"Oh! that's nothing; Miss Stourton is not a bit like her." Or,

"Let's see what she will say, at all events. She's awfully good-natured," (this from Oliver,) "she's sure not to mind, I know."

Mrs. Asheton was delighted with Margaret's account of herself, and though she felt that, when the novelty had worn off, Margaret might often feel the irksomeness of the task she had undertaken in ways that did not at first appear; she also thought there must be a great deal which could not fail to be an increasing source of interest and satisfaction to her in her daily work. In writing to Margaret she told her that the letters she sent home were working wonders there. Mrs. Stourton had been sadly out of spirits for a few days after Margaret left, and Lucy missed her so much that she was scarcely able to cheer her mother or amuse her father by her usual merry nonsense. Gradually, however, they were all becoming reconciled to the idea of her being at Northcourt, and to anticipate with pleasure her cheerful letters, which enabled them to picture her to themselves

so well, and which conveyed such comforting cheering thoughts of her as not merely contented but really happy as well.

In one of her letters to Lucy she told how she had arranged the little pictures and ornaments which she had brought from Teesdale. Most of the pictures were hung over the mantel-piece in her bed-room, but the little gifts and keepsakes of china and other ornamental wares she had disposed on the top of the low bookcase which had, by Lady North's desire, been placed between the two windows of her room. Maude and Fanny and Oliver had assisted in the picture-hanging, Oliver having knocked in the nails required for them with his own hammer, and when all was in order the children pronounced it as their opinion that "Miss Stourton's room looked quite lovely." Maude delighted in getting Margaret to tell her the little histories connected with some of these ornaments and pictures. They were small mementos of varied but true interest to their owner, and Maude's imagination and power of sympathy soon made them objects of interest also to one possessing such a warm little heart as hers.

Margaret's brother William had been offered another curacy a short time before she went to Northcourt: he had accepted it gladly, as it was in some respects a better one than he had had before. He had received but a very small stipend in the first, so small indeed that he could barely live upon it, even in the most economical manner.

But for this, he would have made a strong effort to deter his sister from going to Lady North's: as it was, however, he said very little about it. He could not offer help, as he would gladly have done, to his family, so he felt that it was not for him to make objections to a step sanctioned by his father and mother, especially as he knew their consent must have been wrung from them by the pressure of circumstances equally beyond their control and his own. The new curacy offered to him was in a large cathedral town celebrated for its manufactures, where he was likely to have hard work among a very different sort of people from those to whom he had been accustomed, but not less interesting, though perhaps less easy to deal with in some respects, than the agriculturists in his last remote parish.

CHAPTER VII.

"Let easy mirth his social hours inspire."
WORDSWORTH.

"I HEAR our new curate is come," said Miss Dacre to her sister Bessie; "so I conclude we shall have the satisfaction of hearing him preach next Sunday."

"Satisfaction! Humph! what makes you so sanguine? For my own part, considering the mistake Mr. Leslie made in his last selection of a coadjutor, I cannot say I venture to anticipate either satisfaction or pleasure from the arrival of the successor."

"Oh! he must be better than poor Mr. Black, at all events."

"I don't see that! I dare say there are worse to be found, and this new man may be one of them. The last was Black, this one may be Black*er*, to be ere long exchanged for Black*est*."

"Your evil deeds cause you these gloomy forebodings, Bess; I, on the contrary, fully expect to find this new curate will turn out to be Mr. White."

"The carriage is at the door," said a footman.

"Well, good-bye, Bessie, I dare say I may not be back till dinner-time. Take good care of yourself," and down stairs ran Miss Dacre.

"Now, Digby, you must give it to me. Had you not been lying *perdu* in that room in so discreditably dishonest a manner, you never would even have known the box was there. You are taking a mean advantage."

"Oh, how shocking of you to say such cruel things of your poor cousin!" and he put his handkerchief to his eyes, holding the box at arm's length with his left hand.

Bessie sprang on a chair to reach it; he jumped back across a little sofa, upon which she bounded from the chair to the sofa, and thus came in full view of two gentlemen, to admit whom the door was opening wide.

"How do you do, Miss Dacre; nothing the matter here, I hope?"

"Oh no, nothing," replied Bessie, shaking hands.

"Will you allow me to introduce Mr. Stourton, my new curate?" continued Mr. Leslie. William Stourton bowed, and so did the young lady, all the while looking him very coolly in the face. And then the three sat down. A little suppressed sound emanating from the other side of the sofa at short intervals rather distracted Bessie's attention. It would have been awkward if Digby had laughed aloud; not that Bessie would have cared much, though.

"Mr. Dacre is at home, I think the servant told me," said Mr. Leslie.

"No; he is gone out: he left the house a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh, indeed, I am sorry for that, I wanted to see him on a little matter of business. May I ask you to give him this paper? If he will look it over I shall be much obliged for his opinion on its contents."

Bessie promised to give both paper and message.

"And how is your sister?" continued Mr. Leslie. "Is she not with you?"

"Yes; but she is out driving now."

"And you are alone. What has become of your cousin? Eton has not begun yet, has it?"

"Oh, no; I think he has nearly a fortnight longer."

"So I thought."

Then, turning to William Stourton, Mr. Leslie continued, "You are not an Eton man, are you? or you might have been glad to find an Etonian here; there is always a sort of freemasonry between them, I fancy."

William said he was not, and then asked one or two questions about young Digby, ending by supposing he must be high up in the school, by way of saying something.

"I am sorry he is not at home now," Mr. Leslie said, "but you will make his acquaintance some other day, I dare say;" and then he went on talking to Bessie, while William sat silent and somewhat abstracted, till he found that almost unconsciously he had been observing the slight movement of the sofa hangings, and then he became aware that from beneath them a blue eye, full of

merry malice, was directed away from him, but towards Bessie. Suddenly she was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which William clearly saw was the result of an effort not to laugh, an effort he fully shared with her. Mr. Leslie, looking as if he thought her manner altogether rather peculiar, soon after rose to go, and he and William Stourton took their leave.

"Something strange about that family," said Mr. Leslie; "I never go to the house but I am sure to have an odd kind of impression of something behind the scenes. I never should be surprised if I found some one concealed behind the curtains."

"Or under the sofa," suggested William.

"Eh! what you observed it, then? now that is certainly curious."

The two paid a few more visits together: Mr. Leslie thinking his young curate would be glad to make some acquaintances, was bent on introducing him to some of the neighbours.

On the following Sunday morning Digby came down to the breakfast-room, and finding no one there, amused himself with Ellinor's cat, more to his own satisfaction than that of the animal, when the rustling of silks announced the approach of his cousins. He started up with an exclamation of surprise and admiration, and bowing low, begged to know the meaning of what he beheld.

"Hunger, on my part," said Bessie; "so please to ring the bell."

"Are you not aware that you have had no breakfast?" asked Ellinor.

"Ah! now I comprehend," proceeded Digby, pretending to listen. "Only fancy my being such a pagan as not to remember. Why, it is Sunday, and there is the sound of the church-going bell. Yes, the truth dawns on me, and an apt quotation also; for I suppose I am to have the honour of escorting you to church, where, 'in silks and satins new, with hoops of monstrous size,' &c. &c. But, alas! I fear your best intentions are doomed to see small results; for was it not our new curate whom I saw trotting by on the rector's sorry jade at an unearthly hour this morning? Long coat, bad hat, feet at right angles,—"

"Bess, will you have tea or coffee?" inquired Ellinor.

"Coffee, please; and Digby, will you be so good as to cut some bread, and cease chattering?"

Mr. Dacre entering at the moment, Digby did not resume his nonsense immediately, contenting himself with gestures and grimaces which Bessie found it very difficult not to notice, although she intended to ignore them.

"My dears, if you see Mr. Leslie to-day, tell him I've read his pamphlet, and ask him to dine here next week," said Mr. Dacre. "But no; I think I had better write to him myself—or—no, you can write, Ellinor, and send back the paper; here it is."

"What day shall I say, Papa?"

"Day? oh,—Wednesday. Or perhaps Thursday will be best—yes, say Thursday."

"Have you seen Mr. Stourton, uncle Dacre?" asked Digby, after a short pause.

"Who are you talking about, Digby?"

"Mr. Stourton, uncle; Mr. Leslie's new curate."

"He called here with Mr. Leslie, papa," said Ellinor.

"No, I have not seen him; I know nothing about him, nothing whatever."

"I mentioned his calling," said Ellinor.

Mr. Dacre made no reply. Digby looked at his cousins as much as to say, "It won't do;" and silence prevailed till breakfast was over.

William Stourton, who was in church, after all, was pronounced to be a great improvement upon Mr. Black, even by Bessie, when they returned from morning service; and Mr. Dacre, who went to afternoon church with his daughters, kept awake during great part of William's sermon, and said he thought Mr. Leslie "had made a change for the better."

"Ask him to dine here on Thursday, Lyl," he added, as he went into his library, where he spent the rest of the day and most of the evening alone, as usual. No one who knew him well was much surprised by what Mr. Dacre did, for no one could ever say what peculiar thing he might or might not do. He was just as likely *not* to take the slightest

notice of William Stourton, as to ask him to dinner every day of the week. But William was rather surprised at so soon receiving an invitation, before he had even seen Mr. Dacre; he was, however, none the less ready to accept it, being very curious to see a little more of the family.

At a few minutes after seven on the Thursday evening he found himself in Mr. Dacre's drawing-room. Very comfortable the room looked, presenting a striking contrast to some he had seen that day, for he had had a hard day's work of parochial visiting. The weather was extremely cold, and coal tickets and other aids were being distributed to the poor, and William had been trying hard to discover what families were most deserving or most in need of extra relief.

Poverty in summer-time never looks half so miserable as in winter. Even poverty can smile in the bright sunshine, but when cowering over a wretched apology for a fire, or shivering under the thinnest of thin blankets, the smile is exchanged for an expression of dejected suffering often very sad to witness.

William was long enough alone in the drawing-room to be able to observe how well and even luxuriously it was furnished. Pictures, beautiful old china, cabinets of rare workmanship, books in rich and well-chosen bindings, ornamental woodwork, pretty statuettes, and many more things pleasant to eye and taste, were to be found in all parts. He quite enjoyed the sort of sensation

which so much refinement and beauty gave him, and the rest to mind and body was very agreeable.

Mr. Leslie came very late; he laughed as he shook William warmly by the hand, and told him he would be wiser in future than to suppose seven o'clock *meant* seven o'clock at Mr. Dacre's.

There were no other guests. For the first quarter of an hour at dinner the party were uncommonly silent, but then they seemed suddenly to brighten up, and to William, at all events, the evening was pleasant, and he was a good deal amused. The two young ladies were musical, and had both plenty to say when they chose to talk. Bessie could sing well, he found, and she did not seem to dislike his appreciation of her talent. They both told him marvellous stories of the little world into which he had so lately been introduced, and appeared to have the oddest set of neighbours possible to conceive. He did not think it necessary to believe all he heard; neither, indeed, for that matter, did they seem to expect he would do so, which showed a reasonable state of mind on their part.

Digby wanted him to promise to come and skate with him; and when William, with rather an amusing glance at Mr. Leslie, said he did not know if he could make a positive engagement for the next day, Bessie exclaimed at the disagreeableness of "being under orders." "How you must hate it!" she said. "I always class curates, tutors,

and governesses together, as a people to be pitied. I have not much pity either in my composition, at least so Ellinor says, but I do pity poor wretches who have to fulfil either of those duties."

William laughed outright at this plain-spoken speech.

"No doubt," he said, "we poor creatures are in a somewhat pitiable estate. It is very soothing, of course, to have your sympathy; and yet, I don't fancy all tutors, governesses, and curates, will be ready to acknowledge themselves so wretchedly off as you think."

"Oh! I dare say not; some people are by nature of a high-flown, poetical, self-sacrificing temperament."

"A temperament you hold in much contempt!"

"Oh! I don't say that, exactly; because, of course, it is a good thing for those whose endurance is sustained by it. A delusion may be in some cases a valuable possession."

"Well, but supposing you had a profession to choose, what would you decide upon?"

"I hardly know," said Bessie, laughing. "Does not a government clerk have fixed hours of employment, with liberty to be as idle as he pleases all the rest of his time? That might suit me best, I fancy, though I shudder to think what I should go through at my desk!"

"A totally objectless and aimless life, then, in fact, is the one you would prefer. I can only sug-

gest that pursued in the debtors' prison. Could you not manage to get there, do you think?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. It must be very pleasant, of course; but one has to be declared bankrupt, or some such thing, I suppose; and I don't know the way to arrive at so desirable a state of affairs without thought and trouble, both of them strong objections to the plan. No; you must think of another for me. I decline that one."

"I know, I know!" said Digby. "I'll tell you what, now. Here's a first-rate one for you. Just break your leg, or sprain your ankle, and you are at once laid on the shelf, at least, for months. The ice to-morrow offers you every facility, and I'll give you as many pushes for half a sovereign as you choose to have."

"Oh! thanks, thanks, my dear Digby; a most liberal offer, and by far the best plan yet suggested."

"And then, you know," continued he, "why, you can just do the same again next year, and the next after that!"

"You really are most wonderfully fertile in resources. I had no idea you were half so clever, or such a friend."

"*I* have not another word to say," said William; "I am utterly thrown into the shade, and envy your cousin more than I can say the gratitude you are bestowing on him, and which he undoubtedly deserves."

"Ah, well," replied Bessie, "you did your best for me, you know; so I will allow you to assist in picking me up, if that is any consolation for your failure." Mr. Leslie was now saying "good night," so William followed his example, and they took their departure.

Not many days had elapsed however before, as in duty bound, William called at Mr. Dacre's, and was fortunate enough to find the two sisters at home. Old Mrs. Seymour, and her son, the colonel, member for the southern division of the county, were also paying a morning visit there. Bessie, looking very full of mischief, was busily engaged in an argument with Mrs. Seymour, whose good-natured face wore rather a puzzled expression, and attracted William's observation.

"But, Mrs. Seymour," Bessie was saying, "you surely do not mean to say that if I were to confess to you that I had spent the morning in reading the Newgate Calendar, you would return to Castle Priors under the impression that I should pay you a midnight visit in the character of a burglar? Should you really tremble at every sound you heard, thinking it was me picking the lock of your jewel case?"

"Well, no, I don't mean exactly that," replied the old lady; "but I think if the books are wicked, as you say they are, it cannot be right, you know, my dear, for you to read them; and then, you see, you say you like them: that seems as if you liked wickedness."

"Of course I do! Why it is a hundred times more amusing than goodness. It is a hundred times more interesting to read about bad people than good ones. If you wish me to love goodness, *never* put a good book into my hands, it would be fatal; but *I have* just a hope that bad ones may have the contrary effect on me. You can't imagine how terribly I am bored by good books."

"What do you think about this, Mr. Stourton?" asked Mrs. Seymour, who had seen that William had overheard some part of the conversation.

"Mrs. Seymour, this is not fair, upon my word," exclaimed Bessie; "you know he is bound to take your view of the case, whether he agrees with you or not."

"Indeed, Miss Dacre! that is rather a startling announcement," said William.

"Oh! yes, you will think it your duty to say I ought to read the good books, and abjure the bad ones. You are not willing to deny that?"

"But I am."

"You are? Oh! that is too delightful; *now, now*, Mrs. Seymour, what will you say?"

"It seems to me very shocking, my dear; it was not so when I was young, but it seems to be the way now."

"But, Miss Dacre," continued William, "I am not sure I *altogether* agree with you. You know I have not heard the whole of this discussion; I have only heard just enough to make me decide

that you must certainly read no more good books for the present. I am not so sure that I should advise your continuing to read the bad ones."

"Ah!" cried Bessie, triumphantly, "I was right; I knew you would feel bound to say something of this kind. Mrs. Seymour thinks me in danger of following the example of at least half a hundred of the shockingly behaved heroines I read of. Have you the same fears for me?"

"No; I hardly expect you to manage to imitate half that number."

"Then half a dozen of the very worst, at all events?" laughed Bessie; "it is amazingly kind of you. But now, seriously, what can it signify whether I read these books or no? They amuse me immensely; I like to read of varieties of character. I know the people do very wrong, and I know the world is wicked, but it is not from these books only that I learn the fact: why you yourself told me so in church, last Sunday, Mr. Stourton."

"If you were to tell a child that the fire was capable of scorching him, would you expect him to walk into it?"

"No; but if he knew warmth was pleasant, I should wonder at his keeping away from it."

"But suppose, in his reckless desire to enjoy it, he set himself on fire, and was severely burnt."

"Oh! you mean that I run too near danger; but you are assuming that. You don't know that these books are dangerous to me."

"I quite allow for differences of temperament,

but I still think bad books undesirable —— and ——"

"Why do you hesitate? I want to know all you have to say; what you would say if I were your sister?"

William smiled. "Perhaps," he said, "I should ask her if she would send a child who had had the good fortune to be carefully brought up, into the society of those whose early training had been amid vice and crime. It appears to me, in short, that if we wilfully accustom ourselves to the contemplation of evil, and familiarize ourselves with it, whether in books or in real life, we increase the difficulty of hating it as we ought, and of keeping ourselves pure in thought."

Bessie paused; his tone was rather more serious than she expected. Further discussion was put an end to by Colonel Seymour, who made some inquiry of William, followed by an invitation to dinner at Castle Priors on the following Tuesday, where he would meet the Dacres, among other guests.

"I shall have more to say on my side by that time," said Bessie, as she shook hands with William; "I am not vanquished yet, I assure you."

"Or convinced?" he replied.

CHAPTER VIII.

"God liveth ever!
Wherefore, Soul, despair thou never!
What though thou tread with bleeding feet
A thorny path of grief and gloom,
Thy God will choose the way most meet
To lead thee heav'nward, lead thee home."

ZIHN, 1682.

ON his way home William paid a visit to an old lady who entertained him with a long history of the thoughtlessness and ill-behaviour of her servants, and the ingratitude of the poor in her neighbourhood. Miss Perring deplored the worldly-mindedness of her richer neighbours, and ended by consulting her visitor on the way to refurnish her house, and make it, if possible, more luxuriously comfortable than it already was. He gave her his advice, which however did not seem exactly to suit her, and left her still undecided about a certain carpet she thought of getting, as he wanted to look into a few poor homes on his way back to his lodgings, where, when he arrived, he found his solitary dinner awaiting him, and letters from Teesdale.

Having read them, he sat down, with a grave, preoccupied expression on his face, and certainly did not do full justice to his landlady's cookery, which, in its way, was always particularly good;

and when he rang the bell, to give notice that he had finished, and told her that she might "take away," she paused, as if more than half inclined to ask whether he had any complaint to make, as he had eaten so little.

She placed the dishes in the tray in such a petulant manner as to make more noise than usual; but she did not succeed in rousing the attention of her lodger, who was apparently too much engaged in thought to notice any of her little manœuvres. She smoothed the red cloth on the table, moved the chairs, and shook out the window-curtains, and then, giving a good long look at William, she inquired, in an injured tone, whether he intended to take tea at home or not.

"Eh? Oh! well, perhaps I may," he answered, "but I am uncertain; I'll ring, Mrs. Bloom, if I do. I may possibly go out, and then I shan't want tea here, you know."

"Oh! very well, sir; as you please, of course, sir," and she left the room.

As soon as she was gone he rose and stood upon the hearth-rug, leaning his elbow on the mantel-piece; then he walked across the room and looked out from the window. It was a wet night; the light from the street lamp just opposite was reflected in the puddles, and the passers-by hurried along as though they would fain be at home, or, at all events, under shelter. A westerly wind drove the rain with some violence against the window-panes. William shrugged his shoulders, pulled the

curtains close again, and turned up his lamp till it shed a cheerful light over his little parlour: then he stirred the fire till it blazed brightly, and proceeded to take down from a book-shelf several books, placed an inkstand upon the table, and taking from a drawer a quire of sermon paper, sat down resolutely, and wrote for an hour or two with exemplary diligence. When he stopped, the rain was still pattering drearily on the window-panes, the atmosphere of the room felt chilly, and looking round he saw that his fire, which at the best of times had a most provoking inclination to apathy, was now reduced to a heap of black cinders, with the exception of a little bit of coal in one corner which yet emitted a tiny flickering flame.

The clock of the cathedral was sonorously striking nine, and William hesitated for a few moments whether or not to ring the bell for tea and order his fire to be re-lighted. He did neither, however, but, wrapping himself in a waterproof coat, and taking his umbrella from its peg, he ran quickly down stairs and left the house. He bent his steps towards the rectory; for Mrs. Leslie, his rector's aunt, a very kind, agreeable old lady, who kept house for her nephew, had said that morning, when she accidentally met William, that, if he had nothing better to do, and was inclined to spend an evening with her, she should be much pleased to see him; adding, however, that Mr. Leslie had an engagement, and would not be at home. This did

not make William disinclined to accept her invitation, as he liked her very much.

She received him with her usual courteous, cordial manner, making him feel he was very welcome. "I am so glad to see you!" she said, laying down her book and her gold spectacles upon it, and shaking hands with him; "I have been doing my best to put out my eyes by reading 'Villette' in small print, and now I shall rest them and enjoy a discussion with you on the merits of the characters in it; I always like to talk as well as muse over what I read. Take that arm-chair; no, not that one, I recommend the other, it is the most comfortable of the two: and won't you draw it nearer to the fire?"

They soon fell into a discussion on 'Villette' and other works by the same author, and finally had a long talk over 'Lucy Snow.' At last William said, "Perhaps you will be surprised at my saying so, but I certainly do feel sometimes tempted to believe that Lucy Snow is not altogether mistaken in that idea of hers with regard to hope. I mean in so far as it concerns us in this life. I confess the idea comes across me at times when I see such unequal measures of this world's blessings dealt out to mankind, and often with so little opportunity of improving their condition afforded to those who seem most deserving, while with others it is so different."

"Yes," said Mrs. Leslie, "I do not wonder that such a thought strikes people, for there is great

apparent inequality, and some do seem destined to success, while others appear doomed never to rise above the pressure of their difficulties. And yet I am myself inclined to think that things are, after all, less unequal than they appear to us to be."

Both were silent for some minutes after this. The silence was interrupted by Mrs. Leslie.

"Mr. Stourton," she said, "I am going to say what I am much afraid may seem almost impertinent; but do you know I am very much tempted to take an old woman's privilege, and ask you if I am wrong in fancying that you are just now in some kind of trouble yourself. I fancied again to-night, as I have once or twice before, that I saw in your face an expression that told of sorrow. Perhaps you are feeling the loneliness of your position in this great town. Will you let me say that if you have any trial which would be lighter to bear if you could talk it over with a friend, I should be so happy to be considered in that light, and thus to be of any sort of use or comfort to you?"

He looked in some surprise into the kindly face of the speaker, always so full of sympathy and benevolence. Then, after a moment or two, he said in a voice that was just in the least bit husky,

"It is extremely kind of you to speak to me in this way. I am exceedingly obliged. I had no idea," he continued with a smile, "that I had betrayed myself. I suppose some letters from home which I got to-night affected me more than

I was aware they had done, but I have no right to intrude my troubles upon others. I feel as if I ought to beg your pardon for bringing you such a melancholy guest as I am afraid I must have appeared to-night."

"If you answer me in that way I shall repent of my words," said Mrs. Leslie. "I am very sorry to hear you speak of bad news from home. I hope it is not illness that is causing your distress?"

"Yes; illness is at this moment the chief cause of our troubles. My father, I am sorry to say, is ailing more than usual. He is never well at the best of times, but he has been very unwell this week."

"I am sorry to hear it, indeed; and your mother, I think you told me, is not very strong?"

"Oh, no, she is far from it. Family troubles and difficulties have tried her, and I fear she misses my eldest sister a good deal. My sister has taken a step for which I greatly honour her, but which disturbs me exceedingly, and my mother feels her absence very much, I am sure."

"What can this step have been?" thought Mrs. Leslie. But William had heard the house door open and shut, and he turned to the table and took up a book of photographs which lay there, just as Mr. Leslie entered the drawing-room, so no more was said upon the subject of his supposed troubles that evening.

CHAPTER IX.

"They pray and they work: they do their parts
With patient faith and unswerving hearts."

F. A. T.

WILLIAM received very little more in the way of salary than Margaret did, and he had to provide every thing for himself. His great dislike to her becoming a governess had made him long excessively for the power of assisting his family, which however was at present impossible. Sometimes a doubt would cross his mind as to whether it would not have been more right to have adopted some other profession, by which he could have earned more than he now could as a curate. But his choice had been one that gave great satisfaction to his family, and to none of them more than to Margaret herself. Hearing from her how thoroughly interested she was in her work, and how really happy she was, made him begin to feel somewhat more reconciled to the step she had taken. "We are both working in a good cause," she said, in one of her letters. "Why should you not rejoice for me as I do for you, that we have this happiness? You *must* not fret about me; you must not, indeed."

Margaret got on very successfully with Maude and Fanny, but Oliver gave her some trouble at times. He was so very careless, and forgetful of good manners. He would bring his dogs and himself, covered with mud, into the school-room, omit to wash his hands before tea, and commit various other small sins of omission and commission which it did not do to overlook. Then, when remonstrated with, he would get cross, knock over any thing that came in his way, or sit sulkily kicking his heels against the side of the window-seat. But he was really fond of Margaret, and felt grateful, though he did not always appear so, for the kind interest she showed in his pursuits and fancies. She noticed his moods as little as possible, and they seldom lasted long. Sometimes she was obliged to show actual displeasure. It happened one day, for instance, that contrary to her express orders he led his dog up stairs, saying it was hurt, and must lie on the hearth-rug. She was much annoyed at his venturing without asking leave to do such a thing. She had left the room for a short time, and on returning she found the dog lying before the fire.

"If you had brought him here, and had then come and asked my permission to keep him on the rug, it would have made a difference; though that, even, would not have been right after what I said to you last week; but you know this is real disobedience. As it is, I must have him taken away. He will be quite as comfortable in the house-

keeper's room, but of course you must not stay there with him."

"You don't feel for him a bit!" exclaimed Oliver. "You won't believe he is hurt, because you are so cruel!" and he burst into passionate tears.

Margaret resumed her book, for she saw the disappointment he felt was so great that he was scarcely master of himself; afterwards, however, she had a talk with him which he did not soon forget. Once after an occasion of this kind, when he had been very rude and perverse, she spoke to him seriously, and said she must forbid his spending the afternoon with Will Shirley, and she sent him very early to bed. Three days after he brought her a present from Bruton, not in itself very valuable, but extremely so to Margaret, as proving how perfectly he forgave her for having punished him, and that he felt she had been entirely right in doing so.

On returning from a walk one afternoon, they were all delighted to find Lady Harriett Colvin had arrived. She had been about an hour in the house, and was sitting in the school-room; but Mrs. Baillie was making active preparations for her reception in the little library, not having been able to prevail on her to have either of the drawing-rooms *unhollanded* for her. Mr. Colvin's state had prevented Lady Harriett from leaving home sooner; now, however, that he was better again, she had come to stay two nights at Northcourt. Lady

North had written to her, anxiously desiring report of the children. The school-room part adjourned to the library for tea. It was a nic snug old room in a part of the house much old than that in which the school-room was. The oa panels shone in the bright fire and lamp light, an the ample yellow satin damask curtains which wer let down over the large oriel window gave a chee ful feeling of warmth and comfort.

Lady Harriett and Margaret had a good deal conversation after the children were gone to be and Margaret enjoyed extremely having some on to talk to on subjects of mutual interest. After th children had been well discussed, Lady Harrie mentioned that she had been staying three yea before in the neighbourhood of Teesdale, and sh remembered meeting Captain and Mrs. Stourton a dinner. She also said she knew Mrs. Asheton little, and she said she should write and tell he how grateful she was to her for recommendin Margaret to Lady North, "for," she added, "I thin you are so very valuable here, that we cannot b too thankful to have you with the dear childre and I sincerely hope you will be able to remai with them."

Lady Harriett's visit was far too soon over, an Margaret fully shared the children's regret at he departure, and their hope that she would soo come again.

* * * * *

Several months had elapsed, spring had com

and gone, and it was summer in feeling as well as in name. The weather was particularly warm and fine, exactly suited to the grand fête which was to take place at Howick (a few miles distant from Northcourt), in honour of the birth of a son and heir, and also of the opening of some new school-houses which had been built at the sole expense of Sir Gaspard Howick. He and Lady Howick had only lately come to live on their property, for the house had been too much out of repair for them to inhabit it, and the rebuilding had not been long completed. They were nearly related to the Norths, and the North children were particularly invited to the fête. Lady Howick had called to see them, and had on that occasion asked Margaret to accompany them, which she agreed to do, rather looking forward with interest to seeing a meeting of the kind in a county so distant from her own. She and her charges and Mr. and Mrs. Shirley and their children joined parties on the day of the fête, and divided between their two carriages, drove to Howick together.

It was the first week in June and the day perfect. On arriving, they found the park already thronged; flags flying, bands playing, tents, long tables under the trees, and all the usual accompaniments of such festivities. Lady Howick received them most kindly, and introduced Margaret to her mother before she turned to welcome others, for the arrivals were beginning to be numerous: families and faces all new to Margaret, who, with Maude

by her side, had sat down on a little sofa, rather in the background, amused and interested, Maude keeping up a continual conversation about every body and every thing.

Fanny and Oliver joined a group of children on the terrace, close to the window which opened from the ground.

"Oh," said Maude, "there are the Airleighs whom we used to meet at the dancing academy. Do you see the girl and boy who are speaking to Fanny? I should like to go to them. May I, Miss Stourton? But I don't much like going across the room alone, now every body is sitting down. It is very stupid of me, I know, but do come too—won't you?"

Margaret, smiling at what Maude called her "stupidity," crossed the room with her, and stepped out on to the terrace.

"How d'ye do?" said Miss Isabel Airleigh. "I am so glad to see you! What a long time it is since we used to dance together! I hope you have not forgotten it, though? What fun we used to have!"

"Oh, no," said Maude, "I have not at all forgotten it; I thought of 'the Lancers' directly I saw you, and of my unfortunate mistakes the day you had your frock torn, and Monsieur Argot was so angry about it."

"Is that your governess?" inquired Miss Airleigh, a few minutes after.

"Yes."

"Will she let you walk with me a little way? we won't go far: but there are some children by those trees who appear to be playing at a most peculiar game, and I want to see what it is."

Maude asked if she might go, and Margaret consented. She had previously told the children to keep near her unless they asked leave to go further away.

A lady and two gentlemen met Maude and her friend, shook hands with the former, and came towards the house, and the lady sat down on a garden chair close to where Margaret was standing. Seeing all the rest of the people talking and laughing in gay groups, perhaps made the lady think that her neighbour looked rather isolated, for after a few minutes she spoke to her. It was pleasant to be spoken to, and Margaret took another garden chair, and sat down also. The lady soon found out that she was a stranger in that part of the world, and told her the names of many of the assembled guests; and they were in the midst of a discussion on the characteristics of different counties when a gentleman came quickly towards them, and said, "Mrs. Airleigh, may I take you to the tent?"

Mrs. Airleigh rose, but seemed hardly to like leaving her companion. At that moment, however, all the drawing-room company came out, and Fanny and Oliver ran up, saying—

"May we go to the tent with you now, Miss Stourton? Lady Howick says it is quite time."

"How d'ye do?" said Mrs. Airleigh to the chil-

dren, "I see you don't remember me;" the
turning to Margaret, she added, "Suppose
all walk together: here come Isabel and Mi
North."

"You are well taken care of, I see," said S
Gaspard, as he passed Mrs. Airleigh; "I wond
where my wife is; I want to find her."

"There, close to you," replied Mrs. Airleig
pointing to where Lady Howick, among sever
other people, was coming from the house.

"To be sure," said he, laughing at his blindnes
"This comes of being short-sighted."

One of the gentlemen of Mrs. Airleigh's par
now came up to them, and told Isabel he had be
looking every where for her. "You belong to m
you know," he said; "you must take my arm ar
do the thing *properly*."

"Cannot I be of any use?" said another gentl
man, as they passed two or three.

"I think it very possible," replied Mrs. Airleig
smilingly, and wishing she could introduce Ma
garet to him.

When they reached the tent, the school-childre
were all formed in procession before it, and wi
flags and music, and accompanied by a great mar
of the guests, proceeded down the park to th
school-houses, round which they paraded once
twice, and then returned, cheering with all the
might, to take their seats at the long tables pr
vided for them; and which were speedily covere
with buns, cakes, tea, &c., &c., to which they d

the justice proverbial on such occasions. The whole scene was exceedingly gay and animated.

The Nugents had arrived late. Miss Nugent, very magnificent, was laughing and talking among a gay group; and her brother, with his glass in his eye, as usual, was peering about among the crowd.

Another carriage full of late arrivals soon after drove up close to where Margaret was standing, talking to a gentleman of Mrs. Airleigh's party. He was her nephew, Lord Herbert Ross.

A slight accident had happened to one of the school-children; and as Margaret had seen it happen, and Lord Herbert had run to the rescue of the wounded child, and brought him sobbing to her to have his finger bound up, and be comforted, naturally she and Lord Herbert had begun to talk, without waiting for the usual formality of an introduction; and as she was young, lady-like, and pretty, it was no wonder that they had continued to do so. But suddenly she was aware that some one who had got out of the last carriage was looking at her, and she at once recognized the owner of the little white knife which she had found in the train.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, making a sort of half-movement to advance, but instantly checking herself.

Lord Herbert looked round. A gentleman gave him a friendly smile of recognition, came towards the party, and shook hands with him; again look-

ing at Margaret, as if trying to recollect where he had seen her before. She waited till he had said a few words to Lord Herbert, and then, colouring a little, began to his surprise with—"I beg your pardon, but do you recollect leaving a small knife with a paper-knife handle in the railway carriage some months ago?"

"I certainly left one somewhere or other," he replied; "one, too, that I was extremely sorry to lose."

"I left word at the Brenton station that I had found it," she said, "but I thought I had better take care of it, in case I ever should have an opportunity of returning it to you."

"I went abroad," he answered, "two days after, and never thought of writing to the station-master about my loss: indeed, I did not discover it at first. It is a thing of small value in itself; but from one or two circumstances I am very glad indeed to think I shall have it again—if, that is to say, you are kind enough to restore it to me."

"I shall be most happy to do so, if you will only tell me where I may send it to you."

"Thank you, I will give you my direction;" and he took out a pencil and a card. "Here is my name, and I am now staying at Burleton." The name was Stratton, and in pencil below it he wrote "Burleton, Rowley," and gave the card to her, adding many thanks and apologies for the trouble she would have in sending the knife to him. She then went to join Fanny and Maude, who were at

a little distance, and Mr. Stratton sauntered away towards the ladies of his party, who were sitting under the shade of the trees near by.

"May I ask," said his mother, "to whom you have been talking, Greville?"

"Well, do you know, mother, I have not the slightest idea."

"No idea! why you seemed to have so much to say; I could not imagine what you were about. It appeared as if something very mysterious was going on between you."

"It was the solution of a mystery; for, whoever the lady is, she has promised to restore to me a little thing I had unaccountably lost, and which I much valued. It was a parting gift from Fergus."

"Oh! I recollect your mentioning that you had lost it," said his sister; "but how is it that young lady has got it?"

Her brother explained the thing shortly, and went to speak to other people; much bent, however, on finding out who Margaret was.

"Mr. Stratton! how d'ye do? You were not going to cut me, I hope?"

"I really beg your pardon, Miss Nugent; it was most unintentional, I assure you. The sun dazzled me."

"Well, really now, I am scarcely disposed to forgive you, though I rather believe you were looking the other way, for some reason or other."

"Whatever unkind things you may *now* say, Miss Nugent, they can never make me forget the honour you have done me in speaking to me at all."

"Well, then, I suppose I must save my reproaches for those who can feel them," she answered, laughing.

He stayed talking to her, much to her evident satisfaction. After asking the names of one or two people (for he had been but little in the neighbourhood of late) he said, "And who are those now coming across the grass?"

"Those? Oh, Mrs. Airleigh, and Lord Herbert Ross, and the North children; and Mr. Howe and Mr. Dashwood."

"And the lady talking to Lord Herbert?" he asked.

"Lady North's governess," she replied.

"Indeed! she looks so—so young."

"Yes; so she is, I suppose."

"Do you know her?"

"Oh, just slightly; but, Mr. Stratton, have you heard about Captain Young?"

"No," he replied, "what is it?"

She went off very volubly on the subject of Captain Young; Mr. Stratton, however, was not much interested, and soon left her to speak to others.

"She is such a nice-looking person," he thought, as he again looked at Margaret; "I wonder what her story is: she is so very lady-like and pleasing, too, in manner. Herbert Ross and she are getting

on at a great rate. I wonder who knows any thing about her, and what her name is."

By this time, the children's feast being over, they had dispersed to games and dancing, and the ladies and gentlemen went into the tent, where a déjeuner was served; and there was dancing and archery till seven o'clock, when every one returned to the house for coffee and tea. Mr. Stratton again found himself near Margaret, and handing her a cup of coffee; he went back for cream, and bread and butter, and then brought some for Maude. In doing this he passed Miss Nugent, who observed the proceeding, and apparently for the *first* time becoming aware of Margaret's presence, she bowed very stiffly to her.

Lady Howick, who had heard some account of Margaret, to whom she had taken a fancy the day she called at Northcourt, felt much interested about her, and happening to pass close to where she and Maude were drinking their coffee, she stopped to say a few words to them, and to ask what accounts they had last had from Lady North of Emily.

"I was very much afraid, Miss Stourton," she said, as Mr. Stratton moved away, "that owing to your not knowing many people in this county you might find it rather stupid here to-day. I have been sorry not to manage to introduce you to more, but I have scarcely seen you till now, excepting at a distance, and then I was glad to see you had found some friends. I have been so

much engaged," she continued, "that I hope those I have unintentionally neglected will forgive me."

The band was now playing some waltzes, just outside the window, and several couples were dancing in the hall.

"Would you like a partner?" said Lady Howick.

"Oh! no, thank you," replied Margaret. "You know I am chaperone to-day. But I dare say Maude would. I see her brother and sister are dancing."

"Yes, I will find one for her, at all events; but that is no reason I should not find you one, if you would let me."

Maude being speedily provided with a suitable partner, Margaret sat down by Mrs. Shirley, with whom she agreed that they should order the carriages in an hour, as the children would have had quite dancing enough by that time.

They left accordingly at half-past nine, after a very enjoyable and happy day.

CHAPTER X.

"Go thou, and if thine heart have scorned,
And if thy lip have smiled,
Learn gentler thought, and holier dream,
The spirit of a child.

"Go, learn their love, who conscious still
Of saintly commune dear,
Walk gently on their earthly path
With heaven around them here."

AS soon as Margaret was in her own room that night, she made up the little parcel containing the knife, and directed it to go by the next day's post. It had lain in her desk, and always reminded her of her first long journey from home to undertake her then untried duties at Northcourt. She felt quite sorry to part with it.

The following morning brought letters from Lady North and from Mrs. Stourton. The first expressed much delight and satisfaction with the accounts she received from Mrs. Shirley and Lady Harriett Colvin, of Margaret and her charges. Lady North was still very uncertain about her plans, but seemed to think she should be obliged to remain some months longer abroad.

Margaret's letter from home was not so cheering; her mother was more anxious about her father again. It was now decided that the little family should go from home for a few weeks, partly in order to try the effect of change of air, and partly that some repairs, now absolutely necessary, might be completed during their absence. The roof of their house was quite unsafe, and the work had been longer delayed than it ought to have been on account of the expense. Margaret was indeed glad to be able to send a ten pound note back to her mother by return of post, with an earnest entreaty that it might be used in any way most conducive to her father's comfort, and that of the family generally. Her wishes were understood, and the money was spent as she intended it should be.

During the summer, she and the children spent the day several times at Lady Harriett Colvin's. They went early, so as to be in time for breakfast, and returned in the evening when it was cool. There was in the neighbourhood a large family of children, to whom Lady Harriett was glad to show kindness for their parents' sake, and she sometimes invited them when the Norths were coming. The first time these children came, their mother came with them, and left them, sending for them after tea. They were at first shy, then unruly. However, as they were good hands at games, they played happily enough with their companions.

Their manner was decidedly rude to Margaret. The next time they came, their governess and an elder sister were with them. This girl was absurdly affected. She talked in a drawling way to Lady Harriett, taking no notice either of Maude or of Margaret.

"I hear that our new neighbours at Forde are charming people," she said; "so accomplished, and very literary. They have just joined our book club, and have ordered most scientific works; one is on geology, another is a treatise on botany, and, if I remember right, the third is something about the progress of the human intellect. I find geology a most fascinating study, and I intend at once taking up botany. I feel so much encouraged to do so by hearing how scientific our new neighbours are; one so seldom meets with intellectual people."

"Knowledge is so pleasant, that I think you do wisely to acquaint yourself with any subject that is improving or interesting," answered Lady Harriett.

"Oh, yes! you are quite right, I am sure, and this is what I now fully intend doing. Real knowledge is quite a different thing from mere accomplishments, which may do well enough in the butterfly world of fashion; but I wish to attain to something higher and more enduring. I quite worship the intellectual, in fact."

Lady Harriett looked a little surprised at the words and tone of her young guest; but luncheon

being announced, she said nothing more, and led the way to the dining-room.

During luncheon she conversed chiefly with Margaret and Miss Edge, the Barings' governess, who looked very miserable, and scarcely replied. Margaret found some difficulty in realizing herself to be in the same position as Miss Edge. No two people could look much more unlike. "But," she thought to herself, "I am a governess and she is a governess, and yet,—she is precisely the kind of person I am at first inclined to shrink from; she is exactly one's ideal of 'the governess' in a novel." Miss Edge was tall, thin, pale, melancholy, and almost morose-looking. "It is long since she has been happy, poor thing," thought Margaret, continuing her reverie, "I must try to get her to let me make friends with her."

Margaret was sitting next the eldest Miss Baring, but finding a few words which she addressed to her were received very coldly by that young lady, she involuntarily looked at Miss Edge, and met her sharp, inquiring glance. She took no further trouble with the eldest, but addressed some commonplace remark to the second girl, which was somewhat better received. After luncheon the party adjourned to the garden, but Lady Harriett, with an apology to the two governesses, soon returned to the house to write letters for her husband. Miss Baring, considering herself not only neglected, but quite insulted (she was but sixteen), took up her parasol and walked away with a most im-

pressive dignity, first sending her youngest sister to find a novel which she had seen on the drawing-room table.

"Won't your sister come with us?" asked Maude.

"She! oh, la, no! she is too old, and too cross; and what is more, we don't want her," was the reply of the boy addressed.

The Norths were rather shocked, and remained silent for a few minutes; but as they had no reason to desire Miss Baring's society, they soon forgot all about her.

The two governesses sat together for some time, and gradually got into something like conversation; but Margaret found her companion very difficult to get on with. Miss Edge did not seem to understand her, and kept up a sort of formal style, which was most particularly uninteresting. After a while, however, Margaret's frank, open ease of manner led Miss Edge to forget herself a little, while they took a walk through a pretty plantation, and then sat down by a little noisy stream, into which Margaret kept throwing twigs and small pebbles, as they listened to the merry shouts of the children. Miss Edge suddenly exclaimed—

"I could never have imagined you were a governess!" This she said with a sort of gasp, and so abruptly that it quite startled Margaret; and she looked up quickly as she asked, "Why not?"

"Because you seem so happy, and just like any other young lady."

"Well! but why should I not?"

"Why should you *not?*" said Miss Edge, sharply, "because it is a wretched existence, consequent upon misfortune."

"Yes, consequent upon misfortune it is, generally, no doubt; but, happily for me, I have not found it a wretched existence. I have thought often that I must be peculiarly fortunate, and I suppose I am."

"Indeed, I suppose you are," replied Miss Edge; "to judge from your looks, at all events. You are your own mistress, too, I think; are you not? I mean that Lady North is away; so you have not the constant irritation of feeling that you are the *inferior*, because your *superior*," she said bitterly, "is always at hand."

Margaret made no answer.

"Yes," continued Miss Edge, "that degradation wears out one's life; you have that to learn, perhaps: because you are *poor*, you will be treated as inferior, you will be isolated in a crowd, looked upon as a necessary evil; despised, hated, put aside, treated as—"

"Oh, stop! stop!" exclaimed Margaret, "that is really too dreadful a picture. If I were ever to contemplate such a probability, I should be so wretched that I am sure it would unfit me for my duties. I have never been treated in a manner

even approaching to your description, excepting by one foolish, unlady-like girl (for she remembered Miss Nugent), whose behaviour does not in the least affect my happiness."

"Does it not?" said Miss Edge; "then you certainly have not the keen sensibility natural to a person born to a position which through misfortune you are unable to retain. Those who have the acuteness of feeling *ordinarily* possessed by refined and educated persons, can scarcely comprehend the apparent bluntness of your feelings."

Margaret coloured up at this not very civil speech in a way that contradicted the idea of her feelings being *blunt*.

"But, Miss Edge," she said, "what good does it do one to be so very sensitive? Surely if one is in a position which is not dishonourable; one in which one may be very useful, and I should think always have the opportunity of promoting happiness; surely, I say, one may look for happiness rather than misery for oneself in such a case."

"It is very evident to me," replied Miss Edge, "that you know nothing of the trials you will meet with sooner or later, if you are to continue in your present position; but perhaps you know that you shall soon be able to relinquish this kind of life: no doubt that makes a great deal of difference."

"Indeed," said Margaret, "as far as I can tell, there is every reason to suppose that what I have begun I shall have to continue. I see no definite time, I mean, for my ceasing to be what I assure

you I am thankful to be. I don't mean to say that I have become a governess merely for pleasure, but it so happens that I have very great reason to feel thankful to have been able to take the situation I now hold; and, to tell you the truth, I cannot help thinking it is a mistake we governesses make—if you will forgive my saying so—"

"Say any thing you like," said Miss Edge, with a slightly contemptuous smile.

"Well," continued Margaret, "what I was going to say is, that I have often thought governesses make a mistake in looking upon their position as degrading. For myself, I really scarcely ever feel the least hesitation about letting any one know I am Lady North's governess. I don't think I ought, and I am quite determined not to shrink from confessing what I am in no way ashamed of. I don't expect to be treated precisely like a guest at Northcourt, therefore I will not allow myself to feel hurt if I find that in some things I should be treated differently if I were a guest instead of a governess. I try to remember that I am there simply to be of use. But although I am not wanted, merely as an addition to the family, I certainly expect and certainly believe that I shall be treated as a lady. It seems to me that one must expect ups and downs, agreeables and disagreeables, whatever one's position be; for among persons equally well off in this world you certainly do not find equal degrees of happiness; that, I think, you must allow."

Miss Edge sighed deeply, but looked as if she rather preferred to believe that, excepting Margaret, every governess was a martyr. The manner of the Baring children to her and her manner to them was most unpleasing; it was as if they were naturally at variance: but Margaret could not help thinking that it was partly Miss Edge's own fault. As to Miss Baring, the airs she gave herself now that she was less in the school-room and "had masters," as she was continually telling every body, were insufferable, and resented with great bitterness by Miss Edge, who perhaps had more hate than love in her disposition, which circumstances had not tended to improve. She had no home, although a gentleman's daughter, but had been early left to the tender mercies of an uncle, who had a large family and an ill-tempered wife. The uncle was now dead, and Miss Edge and a sister, who had gone to Canada, also as a governess, and who had married a person in trade there, were left alone in the world. Margaret felt herself very happily circumstanced, comparatively.

Their long day together had, after all, been a pleasant one to Miss Edge, and she was sorry when it was over.

"I suppose it will be some time before I see you again, Miss Stourton," she said, rather regretfully; at least so Margaret thought, and with the impulse of the moment she replied—

"Shall I write to you?"

"Yes, do, if you will," was the answer.

Margaret was much pleased to have succeeded so well in her endeavour to make friends with poor Miss Edge. She had been practically acquainted long enough with governess-life to be able to enter into many of its trials, and to understand many things which she used to think mere absurdities. She could see how it was, and why it was, that misunderstandings arose; and how accidental occurrences were magnified into supposed intentional slights. She could make some allowance now for over-sensitiveness. Uninteresting as Miss Edge certainly appeared to be, she was now a decided interest to Margaret, who fell asleep that night during a fancied conversation with her.

She wrote to her, and received a long letter in reply, at the end of which Miss Edge told her she had no idea she could have written so much to any one she knew well, much less to one she scarcely knew at all.

They did meet again, very soon; when the children spent another day at Lady Harriett's. Miss Edge, in the course of their conversation, told Margaret a good deal of her own history. She was at least ten years older than Margaret. She mentioned having lived three years with the family of a Lady Vaux, who, according to her account, had two most disagreeable daughters, and was herself extremely proud. This seemed to be her chief fault. She also mentioned that Lady Vaux had an only son by a first marriage, who, "although perhaps rather proud, too," was yet very

amiable and kind-hearted, and much beloved by all who knew him.

"What was his name?" asked Margaret.

"Greville—Greville Stratton; but it is now many years since I saw him last. I was always so glad when he was at home for holidays. He and his cousin, Fergus Malcolm, who went to sea and died, poor boy! used often to come home at the same time. Mr. Stratton was so fond of Fergus."

Margaret was much interested in the account of Miss Edge's life at that time, and Miss Edge seemed to like going over various recollections. It appeared that Mr. Stratton and Fergus were always kind to her, and felt, she was sure, the cold unthinking neglect she met with in the house. In reply to questions of Margaret's, she went on to mention other particulars about the family. Lady Vaux, she said, had lived a good deal at her son's place, as her second husband, Colonel Sir John Vaux, had had no objection to the plan, and had let his own house. Mr. Stratton had been at Oxford, where he had taken honours, she believed; and he had, she thought, been a good deal abroad since that. He must be about six-and-twenty now. The Vauxes had a house in London, but she heard that they still continued to go to Stratton Park during the summer.

CHAPTER XI.

"'Twas in that mellow season of the year
When the hot sun singes the yellow leaves."
HOOD.

MARGARET had been long enough with her pupils to have become really fond of them, for she found a great deal to love, and a great deal to interest her; while at the same time there was a great deal in their different characters which kept alive her energies. Maude was very sweet-tempered, rather imaginative, and not much interested in her regular lessons generally, though she often became deeply absorbed in parts of history—in the accounts of individual characters or heroes who possessed the particular qualities which she admired. She was fond of poetry, too, and whatever she liked she learnt with great ease; but it was often difficult to get her to apply her mind to the necessary school-room tasks which were appointed for her, and Margaret was obliged now and then to appeal to her sense of duty in a grave and serious manner. Fanny was much the most industrious of the two.

Maude and Caroline Shirley were great friends: Caroline was quite devoted to Maude, whose

opinion on the various questions of (to them) great importance which arise in the minds of girls of their age, she generally thought conclusive: not but that sometimes she found she could not agree with Maude's view of a case, and under those circumstances they generally consulted Margaret, who was always ready to listen with attention to the arguments on both sides, entering into the difficulties of the questions to be decided, and giving her judgment impartially. Of course, sometimes the children gave her more trouble than at others, but on the whole they were obedient and tractable, and very affectionate, which ensured her success in the end. It was but seldom, therefore, that she had to show any real displeasure.

During the warm summer weather they frequently spent the greater part of the afternoon under the shade of some wide-spreading trees at no great distance from the house, and not far from the Rectory. Here they were generally joined by the younger members of the Shirley party, and various amusements, chiefly of the children's own devising, occupied them very happily. What these amusements were, Margaret did not much care; provided they did nothing positively wrong, she left them pretty much to themselves. Sometimes they built little houses, or they made bridges across the brook, at the risk of a scolding from their respective nurses if they made themselves wet or muddy. The brook, with its primrose border, ran murmuring along at a few feet below the platform on which

the trees grew; for on that side there was a steep descent of five or six feet, where the roots of the trees formed a sort of interlaced ladder as they spread over the bank laid bare by time, and the effects of the rains which in wet weather carried the earth down the slope to mingle with the waters in the little stream below. Beyond the brook there was a copse, through which went the church path from Northcourt House.

The children had a habit of considering Maude and Caroline Shirley as leaders, and in their more active games, when they took opposite sides, the two elder sisters were always at the head of the rival parties; but when the weather was hot, they more usually played together in one party.

Before Lady North left home, she had given a pretty copy of "The Lady of the Lake" to Maude; and another, bound exactly like it, of "Marmion" to Caroline. The two girls had taken a sudden fancy to read them to each other out of doors, as they sat together under Maude's tree. Each of the children had a favourite tree which they called their own, and which each considered more beautiful than all the rest. One of their amusements was, watering their trees, in order to accomplish which they arranged themselves in a long line from the brook, handing a water-can from one to the other. It was observed that the watered trees looked much healthier and fresher than the rest of the group. Of this, of course, there could be no manner of doubt.

Margaret was appealed to one afternoon by the younger children, who complained of the desertion of the two elder sisters; and on looking up from the paper on which she was sketching a favourite view, she saw that the two friends were lying on the grass, with their books and some pieces of paper; while they appeared to be quite absorbed in their own pursuits, whatever these might be.

"They are very unkind, and selfish, and ill-natured," said Fanny.

"My dear Fanny, you are using very hard words," began Margaret.

"Well, but Miss Stourton, so they are, really," said Will Shirley; "they won't help us a bit. I never saw such unkind girls."

"They are only thinking of pleasing themselves with their stupid old books of poetry," added Johnny. "I hate poetry, it's all a pack of nonsense."

"And they don't mind if we get wet," said Fanny, again.

"No," said Mary Shirley; "when we told them it made us quite wet, they only said, 'the sun would soon mend that when he gleamed upon us with his fervent rays.'"

Margaret smiled, and Johnny burst out laughing, as he shouted, "Ha! ha! that is a piece of their lovely poetry. I shall go and tell them, I hope when that happens 'he will put their poetry books all in a blaze.' I am sure that is a better rhyme than they can make."

"But, Miss Stourton," began the little girls again, "do speak to them." "Just see how wet my frock is, too," said Fanny.

"First of all," said Margaret, "I must understand what your frock has to do with Maude and Caroline. I thought you five were playing very happily together. What is it you think your sisters should do?"

"Why, you see, Miss Stourton—" began one.

"Why, I will tell you—" began another.

"No, no, not all together; now, first let me hear what Will has to say. Why do you think they are ill-natured and selfish, Will?"

"Because they leave us alone, and won't come and help us," replied he, rather sullenly; "we are making a new bridge, and it is all a plan of Maude's: she and Caroline planned it some time ago."

"And we were to be masons and labourers, and Caroline is Maude's foreman, and—"

"Nonsense," murmured Oliver, flinging up his cap among the branches, and looking half ashamed at these details being so gravely related.

"They said so, Oliver," said Fanny, "and you said yourself it was a capital idea."

"I know," said Oliver, swinging round on his heel.

"And now they leave you to carry out their plans by yourselves, I suppose?" said Margaret.

"Yes; and it is two or three days since they played with us," added one of the children.

"Have you asked them to come?"

"Oh! yes; every day we ask them, and they say they will and they will, but then they go on putting it off."

"I think they will say, that as you are five without them, it is not kind in you to prevent their amusing themselves in the way they like best, and I must confess I think it seems rather hard."

"But, Miss Stourton, they wished us very much to make this bridge, and we don't know at all well how to go on without them."

"Oh! if they wished you to make it according to their plan, and then left you to go on with it all alone, when you thought you might depend upon their help, I think you have some right to complain. I will speak to them about it. But here comes your maid," she said to the Shirleys.

The maid had come with a message from Mrs. Shirley, who was very sorry not to join Miss Stourton, as she had promised, and to tell the Shirley children that a lady had called, who wanted to see them, so their mamma wished them to go home immediately. This put an end to the bridge-building, and the difficulties relating to it, for that day, at all events, and Margaret told her three children she wanted to speak to the school-mistress, so they would walk home through the village.

Oliver and Fanny went on in front, so Margaret

had an opportunity of speaking to Maude at once, and, as is generally the case, she found that there was plenty to be said on both sides of the question.

"The children tell me that you and Caroline have deserted them," she began. "What have you been so busy about that you could not play with them a little while when they asked you today?"

"They did not ask us at all civilly," Maude answered; "they seem to think that we *must* play with them, whether we wish it or not."

"Yes, dear; but you must remember that you and Caroline being the elder ones, they lose a great deal when you do not join them. I do not mean that you need always do so, but you have kept entirely away from them, just following your own fancies for several days, I think; and as they feel that without you they cannot carry out the plans you and they made together, they naturally think you less kind and good-natured than you should be. It seems to me, too, that is setting an example such as I should be sorry they should follow."

"We don't wish to be unkind or selfish, but the others have been very tiresome to us. They have been very dishonourable, too, which is worst of all. We do not wish to play with them if they are not honourable."

"Why, Maude, how can they have behaved so as to deserve such an epithet?"

Maude did not answer directly, but then she said, "It was a secret that Caroline and I had, and on Tuesday Will and Oliver told us they were determined to discover it; so we said they might if they could. We had a secret place under the roots of my tree, where we kept a little box, and they did find it out, though we thought they never would. But that was not all; they opened the box, and took out our things that were in it, and kept them in their pockets, and lost some of them. It was all Will's doing; for if he had not encouraged Oliver, I know he would not have taken any thing out of the box; and I don't think Will has been a bit sorry. Oliver told me that *he* was very sorry that some of the papers were lost, so we quite forgave him; but I don't think Will deserves to be played with, and Caroline is almost sure that he has really got some of the papers now."

"Why did you say nothing to me about it before this?" asked Margaret.

"Because we did not want to talk about our secret, and Oliver was sorry, and we thought you might be displeased with him, perhaps. We were writing a sort of story, not a *real* story exactly, only sometimes I wrote a bit, and sometimes Caroline. It is only just to please ourselves, you know."

"A good deal about subterranean passages and old castles, I dare say," said Margaret.

Maude coloured up and laughed as she said, "Of course *you* may see it, if you wish."

"No, thank you, dear; you may at all events keep what remains of your secret. I think you were generous not to complain of Will and Oliver: they have not behaved rightly, and unless Will tells me what he has done with the other bits of paper I think I must mention it to his mother, for it is ill-natured of him to keep them. I do not at all like you to have quarrels or disagreements. I think you and Caroline do not appear to have been as much in the wrong as I at first thought, but still I do not like your separating yourselves quite so much from the rest. I suppose they were determined to tease you for not playing with them."

"Oh! we should not have minded that. It was all fun till they took away our bits of paper. Will has been very rude lately, several times."

"So I have myself observed," said Margaret; "however, he will, I dare say, behave better when I have spoken to him."

The next day they went again to the beech grove, and in a short time the sound of well-known voices told that the Shirleys were coming, and they soon appeared clambering up the bank.

"I want you, Will," Margaret said, "and you, too, Oliver." There was silence among the remaining group, who walked slowly away. Margaret spoke to both the boys, and Oliver soon

went to join the rest. But it was evident that Master Will was in no very manageable humour, and he stood before Margaret looking extremely sturdy, and far from yielding.

"Then, I am sorry to say, Will," she said, "I really cannot let you go and play with the others. I have told you what you ought to do: you have no right whatever to keep the bits of paper; you certainly had no right to take them out of the box at all. It is not kind, either; for although *you* think the paper all nonsense, as you say, Maude and Caroline are sorry to lose it."

After a pause, he replied, in a muttering manner, "If they were not so ill-natured I should not have kept it."

"They are neither of them ill-natured," Margaret answered. "They constantly give up their own fancies to play as you like, and I have very little doubt that they would have played with you yesterday, had you not behaved so rudely to them. You have now displeased me also, which I did not expect; for you are insisting upon refusing to do as I tell you you ought."

Margaret turned away. The little naughty creature tried to put on an air of indifference, and began whistling; but it was harder to manage than he expected, so he slowly sauntered further and further away. Maude and Caroline were now deeply interested in the bridge-building, and the whole party, excepting poor Will, were hard at

work. They all, however, felt twinges of regret at his absence, and Caroline more than once ran up the bank to see if he was coming; but when she went back again the last time, she said very gravely to Maude, "He is not there!"

"Oh, Caroline!" replied Maude, "what can have become of him?" A vision of his having fled from his home, overpowered by the disgrace of such an uncommon event as Miss Stourton's scolding, had evidently rushed through her mind.

"Shall we ask Miss Stourton?" said Caroline.

"Yes; I should like to do so," said Maude.

"You go, then," said Caroline.

Maude went: "Where is Will, Miss Stourton, do you know?" she asked.

"No, dear," answered Margaret; "but I rather hope he is gone home."

"Oh! is he? won't he play with us to-day?"

"No; for I have told him I do not wish it." Maude lingered. "I know you are quite ready to make friends with him," continued Margaret.

"Oh! yes; we are quite ready."

"I was sure of it, dear; but I was not quite pleased with him myself, so I told him not to join you again to-day."

Maude said no more, but went slowly back to the others.

About half an hour after, Margaret saw some one gliding along at a distance whom she quickly guessed to be Will, and just before it was time for

the children to go home, he came up stealthily behind her, threw a little piece of paper into her lap, and was off again in a moment, running at full speed. It was the piece of paper belonging to his sister and Maude which they were so anxious to have back.

CHAPTER XII.

"That silent moon, that silent moon,
Careering through the cloudless sky;
Oh! who shall tell what varied scenes
Have pass'd between her placid eye?
Dispersed along the world's wide way,
When friends are far, and loved ones rove,
How powerful she to wake the thought
And start the tear for those we love!
Who watch with us at night's pale noon,
And gaze upon that silent moon."

DOANE.

MARGARET and the children crossed the grass on their way home after the scene described in the last chapter, in which Will Shirley had proved the truth of the old proverb, "Better late than never." On reaching the carriage-road, Margaret saw fresh marks of wheels.

"Now then, Maude, Fanny, and Oliver!" she exclaimed, "I have observed something which you, I think, have not discovered—my moss-rose-bud for whichever finds it out the first."

"Wheels! wheels! carriage-wheels! the *marks* of them, I mean. I've got the rose, Miss Stourton; I'm right, am I not?" said Oliver, as he danced round her.

"Yes, you are; but now, who can guess the name of the visitor?"

"Oh! I hope it is some one we shall like to see," said Maude.

With all their guessing they did not guess right. The visitors had gone before they reached the house, and Oliver, who went to inquire who they were, returned with the intelligence that two gentlemen had called. "But no one we know or care for," he added; "they only wanted to see the pictures in the dining-room."

"What a terrible disappointment!" said Margaret, holding up her hands in feigned despair; "it is absolutely necessary for us to do something or other very enlivening, that we may be able to bear it; what shall it be?"

"Oh, tea out of doors under the great elm; and no lessons to-night; and you to tell us a story!"

"Oh! do let us, Miss Stourton; it would be so very very nice, and you know we have not had an extra half-holiday for such a very long time."

"Well, run, then," said Margaret, "and ask Mrs. Watson about the tea part of it."

Quick as lightning ran Maude and Oliver, and, as Mrs. Watson neither saw nor made any sort of objection, orders were given for this *fête champêtre*, Mrs. Watson herself being entreated to come out and see the party at their tea, which she promised to do.

"What a most capital thing for us that those

two gentlemen came to-day!" said Oliver, helping himself with great satisfaction to a plateful of gooseberries; "but for them we should not have had this fun, should we, Miss Stourton?"

"Who were they, nurse?" inquired Maude of Mrs. Watson, who just then came from the house, bringing a cake with her.

"The Reverend Cuthbert Leslie and Mr. Stratton, I believe," she replied; "they wrote their names on a card, which they gave to Mrs. Bailey."

"The Reverend Cuthbert Leslie!" exclaimed Margaret; "oh, dear! how much I should like to have seen him! My brother is his curate. I wonder whether he is staying in this neighbourhood. How I wish I had seen him!"

"The other gentleman inquired particularly after the family," continued Mrs. Watson, "and asked when her ladyship would return."

"Why, does he know mamma?" inquired Oliver.

"I don't know, my dear. I wish," added Mrs. Watson, "my lady could just step out from the drawing-room now, and look at the young ladies and Master Oliver; she would be so pleased to see how well and happy they are looking."

"I wish, nurse," said Oliver, "that Roger could see your cap; I am sure he would admire it very much. He always likes your caps, he says, better than any other person's; and that one is a great beauty. It's quite new, is it not?"

"Well, yes, sir, it is; and I'm sure I wish he

was here to see it: and dear Miss Emily, too, for it was she who gave me the ribbon. She sent it from London the day before she went abroad."

"I was admiring the ribbon," said Margaret. "I thought it was too pretty to have come from Bruton."

"Oh, yes, Miss Stourton; there's nothing so good or so pretty to be got there, I assure you. And when Miss North gives a present, she gives one that is worth having, which cannot be said of every body; for, in my opinion, many presents are not worth the accepting. What I mean is, that some people should either give a handsome present or none at all. At the same time, there are people, of course, from whom the value of the present is to be counted by the love that comes with it; and in that case, you know, ma'am, one does not think of the gift, but of the giver."

"I should not think that ribbon cost so very much," said Oliver; "did it?"

"That I can't say, sir; but this I know, Miss Emily would not have sent it unless she had been very sure it would please me; and most certainly it is a very good one. But I value it because it was so kind of her to think of me when she was in London, and all in the expectation of going abroad, too, directly; that is what makes me like to wear it."

"Nurse is always doing something kind, herself," said Fanny.

Tea, which, with all the conversation in ad-

dition, had occupied them some time, was now ended.

"I think, ma'am, if you will please to excuse me, I will go in now," said Mrs. Watson to Margaret.

"Yes, certainly; it is getting late for us all," replied she.

"Oh! one story more, just a little one. You said you knew one," said Oliver.

"The one I had thought of would certainly be too long."

"Then another, and we will walk arm-in-arm all together up the garden walk; I will get your cloak," said Maude, eagerly.

"You must get your own as well, then."

"Yes! oh, yes!" and away rushed the children in search of the requisite wraps. When they returned, Maude and Fanny joined arms with Margaret, Oliver taking Maude's disengaged arm, and then they turned up the gravel walk through the shrubbery.

"The only short story I can think of," began Margaret, "has also the merit of being true."

"Hurrah! so much the better," cried Oliver. "Do, please, begin."

"There was once a ship going to sail immediately. She was a man-of-war. One of her officers had been sent on shore for some things which were wanted, and he found that several of the sailors' wives were anxiously desiring to get to the ship to see their husbands before they left England. It

was war-time, and they thought they might never see them more, for the ship was to join the fleet in the Mediterranean Sea, where there would probably be fighting. When the officer had finished the business about which he had been sent on shore, and was getting into his boat to return, two poor women came and entreated him to take them out to the ship with him. They knew, they said, that they could get back in the evening by some of the other boats which would be returning. But it was blowing so hard that they were half afraid to venture in a shore boat; besides which, they did not know how to afford it. Well, they begged so hard that the young officer did not know how to refuse them, although his boat was almost as full as it ought to have been, with things he had to take out to the ship. 'What do you think, Jack?' he said to an old sailor, one of his crew. 'Just as your honour pleases,' replied Jack. 'Well, then, I *please* to take them.' 'All right, sir, we can do it,' said the man, touching his hat. 'In with you, then,' said the officer to the women; 'but mind, you must do exactly as I tell you, and neither move nor speak without orders.' 'You may depend upon it, sir,' said they. So they were put into the boat, and told to lie down, and some boat cloaks and tarpaulins were thrown over them, the rest of the things were packed in round them, and they went like part of the baggage. 'Are you comfortable?' said the officer. 'Yes, sir, and thank you for it, and warm, too, we are.' Not another word did they

say. It was now fearfully rough, for the wind became more boisterous every minute; and, had these women moved, it would have been a hard matter indeed to have reached the ship in safety: hard work it was, anyhow. But at length, after more than an hour, they came alongside. Those on board who looked down at the boat were indeed surprised when, on the officer saying 'You may get up now,' two figures rose from the heap of articles in the middle of the boat; and joyful indeed were the poor women themselves, for they had been exceedingly frightened by the pitching and tossing. They told their husbands how kind the officer had been to them, and they inquired his name. He, however, thought no more about them, as he had plenty of things to attend to immediately. The ship did not sail quite as early the next day as had been expected, and just before she weighed anchor, a boat was seen coming towards her, and a young man handed up a basket which he said was to be given to the officer who had taken the two women out to the ship the day before. The basket was taken to him, and he opened it, and found a fine fat duck ready for dressing; and also a letter, full of thanks for his kindness to the woman who had sent it. She 'hoped he would not be offended,' she said, 'by the liberty she was taking in offering him the duck, as she had no other means of expressing her gratitude for his kindness to herself and her friend, and it was one which she had fatted herself on good meal.' He accepted it, of

course, as he would have displeased the poor woman by refusing it; but he said he did not deserve any thanks, as he had had no trouble at all, for they were the best behaved women he had ever seen in a boat on a stormy sea. He sent back some kind messages and thanks by the young man, and when the duck was dressed for the officers' dinner they agreed that they had never tasted so good an one before."

"What a nice story!" said Fanny, taking a long breath.

"So I think," said Margaret; "it is so pleasant to hear of kindness and of gratitude."

"Nurse would quite approve of *that* present, don't you think so, Miss Stourton?" said Maude; "it is just the kind of thing that would please her."

"I shall tell her the story when I go to bed," said Oliver, decidedly.

They had reached the end of the garden walk, and emerged from its shade into light again—comparative light, that is; for the sun had set some little time. Margaret stopped, and told them to listen. "How quiet it is!" she said; "the birds even are scarcely making any sound. You can hear the river plainly now. How pretty those tiny clouds are, still tinted with colour!"

They walked slowly on till they came to a little rustic seat, but Margaret only allowed them to sit there a few minutes, for fear of their catching cold, as it was getting rather damp. She pictured to herself the party at her own home, and fancied

them sitting out in their little garden. Perhaps, too, they had had tea out of doors, for the weather was dry enough even for her father not to be afraid of being a good deal in the open air. Perhaps Mrs. Asheton had driven over to see them,—she often took an evening drive in the summer; perhaps they had been talking about her, and wishing they could see her, and have her among them again. How she should like to see them all! She began talking to Maude about her home as she did sometimes when she felt unusually homesick, and Maude was always delighted to listen. The two younger children she sent in first, as she thought Mrs. Watson would wonder what had become of them; and she and her little companion took one short turn more, that they might look at the moon rising. It makes those who are far off seem near, if you fancy them at the same time with yourself looking at the same object; and now Margaret and Maude pleased themselves by fancying those they loved best contemplating the rising crescent as she grew brighter and brighter, and seemed to glide so quickly past the tall trees in the park.

"How I wish I could write poetry! Can you, Miss Stourton?"

Margaret smiled. "Should you put all that we have been saying into poetry?" she inquired, in answer to Maude's question.

"I don't know; yes, I think I should; at least, some of it,—I should put what *you* have been saying into poetry. I liked what you said about

the quiet stillness making us feel as if we were something like our own spirits walking by the side of ourselves, so that we seem to see ourselves, and as if we were the good separated from the bad."

"You are expressing it rather funnily," said Margaret with a smile.

"Well, but you did say that, did you not?"

"Hark! there is Mrs. Watson's voice; she will scold me for keeping you out so late; run in, dear."

"Tell me what you meant, then, some other time, and write it in poetry for me."

"I don't promise the *last*," Margaret answered, laughing. "Good night, my darling," she added, kissing the child.

Margaret was rather fond of "vague imaginings;" she did not often talk of them to her pupils, but the one which she had mentioned that night was an idea which had often occurred to her when walking or sitting out in the quiet of a summer night, or as she leaned from her window and watched the stars. Her fancy was, that at such times the more spiritual part of her nature became as it were a separate existence, and that she could compare, as from a little distance, her daily life, its thoughts, feelings, and actions, with the better motives, the nobler resolves, the higher, purer tone of that *other* self of whose supposed identity she became conscious, when, at rest from worldly occupations, her mind, unfettered, could range at will in the calm holy quiet of the starry night. Whether she did ever put this idea of hers into

poetry or not Maude could not discover, as Margaret told her the next day, when Maude again begged for the poetical edition, that she must be content with the prose.

In reply to a letter which Margaret wrote to her brother, in which she told him of Mr. Leslie's visit to the pictures in the dining-room at Northcourt, William said Mr. Leslie went to London on business, and afterwards delayed his return home that he might pay his nephew, Mr. Greville Stratton, a visit of a few days. It was doubtless during that visit that he drove over from Stratton Park to Northcourt.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Each at his proper ease, as they had been
Nursed in the liberty of old Sherwood,
And wore the livery of Robin Hood,
Who wont in forest shades to dine and sup—"

HOOD.

LADY Harriett Colvin came one day to Northcourt with a letter from Lady North, which empowered Margaret to invite some of her own family to pay her a visit. Margaret's pleasure and gratitude for the thought were great, as may be supposed; and about a week after she had the delight of welcoming her father and mother and Lucy; the two former to stay a week, the latter three.

Captain Stourton having finished the repairs of his house, had had a most unexpected opportunity of letting it for a month, and had just closed with the offer for it when Margaret's letter, with part of Lady North's to Lady Harriett enclosed, reached them. So they at once determined, long as the journey was, to go and see Margaret, and then to visit several old friends. The week which her parents spent with her was, she thought, one of the most delightful she had ever passed. They were

charmed to find her looking so well and so happy; they were delighted with the children, and much pleased to make acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Shirley, who were kind friends to Margaret. Sir Gaspard and Lady Howick called on them, and they all spent an afternoon, ending with an early dinner, on account of the children, at Howick. To the children it was a very great pleasure also, for Captain and Mrs. Stourton were extremely kind to them; and as to Lucy, she played with them, sang to them, and told them stories, till Margaret said she was thoroughly spoiling them; however, it cannot be said that she took any steps to prevent the "spoiling."

Soon after Captain and Mrs. Stourton left, there was a great pic-nic, the guests at which consisted of Margaret and her sister and the North children, Mr. and Mrs. Shirley and their children, and two young Mr. Shirleys, nephews of the rector, a Mr. and Miss May, and a friend of theirs, Mr. Rivers.

The Mays lived at a curious old house called the Manor, but they had been a long time from home, and had so recently returned that Margaret had not seen them before. Mrs. Shirley had proposed that, as they must all go by the same road to the forest where the pic-nic was to take place, they should all start together, to which plan every one was quite prepared to agree. So the end of the beech avenue was chosen as the place of rendezvous, and they were to assemble there at twelve o'clock.

The morning was not bright; but before twelve the gradual clearing off of the mist made it very certain that a lovely afternoon was to follow. The younger members of the Shirley party had been at Northcourt very early, arranging with Oliver about donkey-carts and tandems. It was a whole holiday in honour of Sir Roger's birthday, and Oliver was determined to make it as long a day as possible, by getting up before six o'clock. The tandem plans were profoundly secret excepting to Margaret, whose consent had to be obtained; but Edward Shirley was known to be remarkable for his driving powers, and as his uncle had said to his own boys, "Oh! you may do what you like if Edward says there is no danger," Margaret had allowed Oliver the same extent of freedom. Just before twelve o'clock, therefore, as she went down all ready to start, she was not surprised to hear a great driving up of vehicles, shouts of laughter, and loudly-given directions; and, running to the open door, she was in time to behold two tandem "donkey-carts" (one, however, on this occasion, it must be stated, was drawn by two *ponies*); and there was also a pony carriage with a pair of ponies, not tandem fashion, while a mixed multitude of grooms, helpers, gentlemen, and children were joining in various ways in the fun. Each chariot, of course, contained its charioteer. The donkey tandem, which had been judiciously placed in the rear of the three conveyances, required considerable exertion to get it to follow at the right distance while they made a

grand sweep round the broad gravel space before the house, and then drew up with great effect before the front door. Miss May was in her brother's carriage. Maude ran across to speak to her.

"Won't you get into my chariot, Miss Stourton?" Edward Shirley said; "I hope for the honour of driving you."

"Oh! thank you," Margaret answered; "but I meant to walk up to our place of rendezvous. Let me see you drive as far as that, and then I shall be better able to decide whether or not I may trust myself to you."

"Miss Stourton! do you mean to convey to me the idea that you mistrust my ability to drive so elegant a turn-out as this? or am I to believe that you are very timid?"

"I am not unreasonably timid, I think," she replied; "but of course I should like to see whether *I* can have that confidence in your driving which I hear every body else has."

"Oh! I see exactly what you mean; you think my friends have puffed me up till they have made me conceited; however, severe as you are, I shall again do myself the honour of offering you a place when we are at the end of the avenue."

In the mean time Margaret had been occupied in arranging how her children were to go. Maude was in Mr. May's carriage; Fanny, and Oliver, and the younger of the two Mr. Shirleys, and one of his cousins, were all in the donkey tandem; another

young Shirley was at the head of one of the donkeys; and a little groom-boy, son of the coachman, at the head of the other. These last were fully occupied and entirely happy. Their cart was filled with nice fresh straw, to save them a little from the jolts, which, however, they would not own to feeling, and they were attended by the coachman, whose devotion to the party left Margaret quite at ease about them. Their donkeys were adorned with ribbons and flowers, the arrangement of which had occupied Oliver and Fanny a good deal during the preceding day or two.

Mr. May drove off, and Mr. Shirley after him. The ponies driven by the latter had never been tandem before; one of them indeed had scarcely been in harness at all, and few besides Edward Shirley could have driven them as he did; but his self-possession and extreme gentleness and tact with horses were quite wonderful; and away they went as nicely as possible. When he had reached the end of the broad avenue he turned round, drove back to the house, taking off his hat as he passed the two Miss Stourtons, and, again turning, pulled up just as he and they reached the avenue gate.

"Now, Miss Stourton," he said, "I hope you are satisfied, and that you and your sister will condescend to mount my chariot."

However, there was a great re-settling of arrangements, and finally Miss May, Margaret, and Alice Shirley were, to Edward Shirley's entire satisfaction,

consigned to his care. They all reached the place chosen for the pic-nic without meeting with any disasters, although the narrow escapes of turning over into ditches and driving against banks had been both exciting and amusing; but as they went at rather a slow pace the danger was comparatively small. Margaret found Miss May a pleasant companion. Before the dinner preparations were completed, they took a stroll together to look at the view from rather higher ground, and to see whether a turn of the road which they had passed, where a tree had lately been felled, would not make a good subject for a sketch for Lucy, who drew very nicely.

Miss May was delighted with Margaret, she thought she should find in her a very nice friend. She had none of her own age near home, and she had often felt the want of one. Emily North she liked much, but Emily had been so delicate, and so often from home on that account, that she did not really know her very intimately. Besides, she very much liked the idea of a friend to whom she could look up. She was only eighteen, and Margaret being just twenty-three, she thought her a very superior person to herself, although at the same time a suitable companion. They both found that their tastes and ideas suited in many ways extremely well.

"I should think you must often have felt very lonely, Miss Stourton, have you not," said Miss May, "since you came to Northcourt?"

"No, scarcely at all," replied Margaret. And then she went on to say how many things had prevented it. First, the Rectory being little more than ten minutes' walk across the park, enabled her at any time to be with kind pleasant friends in a few minutes. And then there were Lady Harriett's visits, which had been pretty frequent. Her own room and the school-room being close to the nursery, where Mrs. Watson always was to be found, prevented the house itself from seeming desolate and uninhabited. "But the thing of all others which has really prevented my feeling lonely is, I believe, that I have been so fully occupied," continued Margaret; "I generally go to bed much about the same time as the children, as I get up early, for I find it very necessary to work hard by myself as well as with them, and there is nothing like work to keep away *ennui*, or depression, you know."

"I wish I was industrious, like you," answered Miss May. "I can't get on alone, I find; there are so often little interruptions, too. I hardly know why, but I always do find reading steadily such a very difficult thing to manage."

"You don't feel inclined to come and read with me sometimes?"

"Oh! Miss Stourton, you are not in earnest, are you? It would be so delightful! but you do not really mean that you would have time to spare or spend for me?"

"Why, the time would be the same as that I now

take for myself. Instead of my reading alone, as I do now for a certain time every day, why should we not read together?—take it in turn to read to each other, I mean. I think we might manage it. We might at all events try it."

"That would indeed be charming; it is the very thing I should like, and my mother would be enchanted. You know," she added, "but perhaps, though, you *don't* know, that my mother is a great invalid; she cannot walk at all, although she is somewhat better than she used to be."

"Yes, Mrs. Shirley mentioned it when first she spoke of you to me," said Margaret; "though, until last week, I had scarcely heard either of you or your family."

"Well," said Miss May, "it consists of my brother, who is here to-day; he is the eldest of us, and has been six years in India; he is in the army; and I have also another brother in the army, and a sister who is married, and who lives in Ireland, with whom we have lately been staying."

A horn blowing at that moment roused Margaret and her companion to recollection of the dinner, which was to be announced as "on table" by a series of blasts, the loudest which Oliver could perform upon a hunting-horn.

"Where *have* you both been?" was the exclamation which greeted them when they reached the rest of the party. "Mr. May, and Edward Shirley, and Freddy, and I don't know who besides, are gone to look for you."

"Are they indeed? Why, we have only been a very little way."

"Make haste, Noll, and blow away on that horn of yours again; or, stay, lend it to me," said the younger Shirley; and he blew a tremendous blast, to which he added a "view halloo," which made the woods ring, and soon brought the others back.

"A regular case of Robin Hood and his merry men," said Mr. Shirley.

"Only there is rather a larger assemblage of 'Maid Marians' than was usual," suggested Edward.

The pic-nic now began in earnest, and the party were all so hungry after their long drive, that the fullest justice was done to the numerous pies, puddings, tarts, &c. &c., spread before them, which rapidly disappeared from public view after the attack upon them had once begun, proving at the same time their own excellence and that of the appetites of the assembled company. Songs were sung, and stories were told, and all the party were as happy and merry as possible. The spot they had chosen was just the place for a pic-nic—half-way up a gently sloping hill, where the beech trees were large and not too close to each other. Their beautiful stems and the light grace of their foliage showed in great perfection. The ground was covered with short close grass, and a quantity of fern grew all around. It was a lovely bit of sylvan scenery. The view before them, too, was both extensive and beautiful. Mr. Rivers was extremely droll; he had a quaint, dry way of saying things which made you

laugh, you scarcely knew why, and Edward Shirley knew how to draw him out, and he got him to relate many amusing stories. He had just been telling them one about the alarm experienced by a party of Londoners at a pic-nic, owing to the surprising evolutions and movements of their dishes and plates, which had been spread upon a large table-cloth on the ground. He described the way in which they had sat staring at the table-cloth, holding their knives and forks uplifted in their hands, till, upon one adventurous citizen seizing a large pie, and putting it suddenly down where the heaving cloth was highest, the pie had bounded back almost into his face, and with a general scream, knives, forks, spoons, had been thrown away, and setting off with a rush down a steep hill, the whole party never once stopped till they reached the bottom where a river impeded further flight.

"What was it?" said Fanny, her eyes wide open, while Oliver, who had guessed, looked the picture of amusement.

"Fairies?" asked a little boy.

"No," said Mr. Rivers,—"There! there is one of them, I declare," he exclaimed.

"Oh,—rabbits! Ha, ha, ha! rabbits, of course," said all the children. "O how foolish the people were to be so frightened!"

One story led to another, till after a while all the party felt inclined to be strolling about again. Edward Shirley sounded a loud blast on Oliver's

horn, by way of signal that dinner was over, when, as he finished, a voice was heard calling, "Halloo! there; Halloo! there!"

"Hallo, indeed! who can that be, I wonder?" said Edward.

"H-e-re," called the voice again.

"Let us go and see what is the matter there," said one of the party, and away down the slope, bounding over the fern towards a belt of trees, ran several of them.

"Don't go far, dear," said Margaret to Oliver.

"No, I won't; and I'll blow my horn if you are wanted."

The servants, who had been recalled by the horn, were now to be left to the discussion of their share of the pic-nic repast; so those of the ladies and gentlemen who had not gone down the hill, moved away in another direction. Margaret and Miss May, however, went to see what kept those who had answered the calls from below. In a few minutes they came in sight of a group of people standing round a horse.

"Some accident, I fear," said Miss May.

"Yes, I am afraid so," answered Margaret. "See, Edward Shirley is examining the horse now. Oh, look, it is dreadfully lame!" They quickened their pace to a run, and soon distinguished a gentleman without his hat, standing with his back to them; the right sleeve of his coat was torn from the shoulder to the elbow, and Mr. May was feeling his arm.

"Oh! that's right," said young Shirley, when he saw Margaret coming towards them. "Miss Stourton is sure to have some sticking-plaster." The stranger gentleman looked round, and as he did so, both he and Margaret gave a little start of surprise.

"How do you do?" he said.

"Quite well, thank you," she answered; "I hope you are not much hurt."

"Oh! no; I believe not. It is a very stupid business; but nothing more, I think," he replied, with a smile. Margaret had taken out her little pocket-book, as she saw that sticking-plaster might be useful; and she was proceeding to cut a piece, for the gentleman showed her a long, deep cut on his forehead, over which he had been holding his handkerchief. "Let me sit down," he said; "the pain in my shoulder makes me feel rather faint, somehow or other."

"Oh! there is plenty of water, and wine, too," said Margaret.

"Edward Shirley is gone for some; he told me so," said Oliver; "I'll run and tell him to be quick."

Margaret cut the plaster into two or three strips, and put it carefully over the wound, holding it firmly down with her handkerchief. Her patient did not speak; he looked dreadfully pale. Mr. May was kneeling on the ground, supporting him.

"I'm better now," he said, after a few minutes.

"I shall be all right directly." His looks, however, rather belied his words.

Edward had now returned with a bottle of wine, followed by a servant, with water and a glass; and after drinking some wine and bathing his forehead, the gentleman seemed really better.

"I am immensely indebted to you all," he said; "I hope I need give no further trouble." On attempting to rise, however, he still found himself so faint that he was obliged to wait a little longer.

Before Margaret came he had told Edward Shirley how the accident happened. His horse, which was an old hunter, and which had carried him over the roughest country, had managed to stumble or catch his foot. Thinking him particularly safe, his rider had ventured through a part of the forest where there was no regular track; and when trotting along at no great pace, he found himself suddenly thrown to the ground, the horse also rolling over. So instantaneous had been the whole thing, that he scarcely knew he had been thrown till he was actually lying on the grass, at some little distance below the place where he was riding the moment before. The horse, which seemed much frightened, had walked towards him, and he had caught it and led it down into the road below—if road it could be called—for it was little more than a rough path; and then, hearing voices, and the blast of a hunting-horn, he had called out in the

hope of getting assistance, as his horse was too much hurt for him to mount it again; not, however, supposing that he was thus disturbing a picnic party.

Of course, he was assured that they were only too glad to have been within call.

It was arranged that Mr. Stratton (for he it was) should join the party, as he would not hear of being driven back at once to Mr. Shirley's, saying that he was really getting better, although it was evident that he was in a great deal of pain. His horse was taken to a cottage at a little distance where there was a stable. He introduced himself to Mr. Shirley, but Margaret had already been asked who he was by those who had witnessed the recognition between them.

He made himself as pleasant as any one in pain could, but it was evident that he was suffering a great deal. As it had not been intended to stay late, Mr. Shirley soon ordered the carriages; and to Margaret's satisfaction she saw Mr. Stratton driven off by Mrs. Shirley in her easy little pony-chair. The rest went home in nearly the same order as that in which they had come.

Mr. Stratton accepted Mr. Shirley's offer of a bed at the rectory, and the doctor was sent for. He was out, however, and did not arrive for some time. When he had made his examination he pronounced that there was a severe sprain of the shoulder; but this, unfortunately, was not all the

mischief; for the small bone of the arm was discovered to be badly fractured, and owing to the delay which had occurred since the accident happened, the arm had become so swelled and stiff that setting the bone was a rather troublesome and most painful affair, besides which there was some danger of inflammation.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some pure ideal of noble life?"

A. PROCTER.

MR. STRATTON talked of going to his own house on the following day, but allowed himself to be persuaded that this was out of the question, Mr. and Mrs. Shirley both begging him to remain at the rectory. In two or three days he was so much recovered that he again talked of moving; but Mrs. Shirley, finding that if he went home he would be quite alone, prevailed on him to prolong his stay till the end of the week then just begun, that he might be within easy reach of the doctor who had hitherto attended him, Stratton Park being several miles off. Every thing in short was said that could make him feel he was giving pleasure by remaining where he was. Mr. Shirley, who often felt the absence of gentlemen's society, very much enjoyed having so agreeable a companion in his house, and it must be confessed that Mr. Stratton certainly had no disinclination to do as he was asked.

Margaret, Lucy, and the children, were as usual often at the rectory, and Mr. Stratton saw a good

deal of them; and when he was able to walk about, he often strolled into the park, where he not unfrequently met them. He also went with Mrs. Shirley to see the pictures more than once in the gallery at Northcourt; and on one occasion he talked to Margaret there a good deal. The more he saw of her, the more admiration he felt for her; he thought her so worthy of all praise. He was greatly interested in an account which Mrs. Shirley gave him of the Stourton family. It certainly appeared, too, that he found talking to Margaret very agreeable, and indeed he had discovered it himself; but what of that? he found many people agreeable.

One afternoon he was sitting on the grass at a short distance from the rectory-house, under a wide-spreading tree which stood on the little lawn; his right arm was in a sling, and he was reading, holding a book in his left hand. Hearing steps, however, he looked up, and saw Margaret, Fanny, and Oliver, walking towards the house-door. He watched them, and thought, as he had before, how particularly nice-looking Margaret was; so much ease and grace in her movements, and her countenance expressive of such good sense and sweetness of temper. "She certainly was pretty, very pretty, in that little brown bonnet she wore to-day." He could not quite hear what was being said, but Margaret appeared to be making some inquiries of the servant, after which she and the children went into the house. In about five minutes, however, she

came out again, and taking the path to the right, went across the grass to some flower-beds where the gardener was at work. After saying a few words to him, she sat down on a seat near by, and watched his proceedings. He soon went in search of some other tools, and she, seeing a flower drooping for want of a little stick to support its frail stalk, went to see if she could prop it up with one that she saw lying near. She was stooping over the plant, when, hearing a step approach, she began to say she thought a stronger stick than the one she had found would be needed. The voice that replied was certainly not that of the old gardener, and looking up quickly she saw Mr. Stratton, whom she believed to have been out driving with Mr. and Mrs. Shirley. Hastily rising, she said something to that effect.

"No," he replied, "I find I was inclined to think too lightly of my accident. The movement of a carriage is not particularly good for me yet, I believe. I find it gives me pain in my shoulder; so I have been more of a prisoner than I expected to be when I saw you last. Is that your seat?" he continued; "you have chosen a nice shady spot."

"I was sitting there for a few minutes," she said, "but I think it must be time for me to be returning home. I gave the children leave to stay with Annie Shirley a quarter of an hour, which must very nearly have elapsed; so I think I must go in search of them."

They walked towards the house; the children,

however, did not appear, and Mr. Stratton called a servant and asked him to let them know Miss Stourton was ready for them; thus effectually preventing her from going after them herself.

The children quickly arrived, and Margaret was beginning to say good-bye, when Mr. Stratton said—

"I have been sitting still so long to-day that I must really take a little walk;" and he proceeded to accompany Margaret through the gate into the park, and along the well-worn pathway leading to Northcourt. After talking on various subjects, he surprised her not a little by saying somewhat abruptly—

"You, Miss Stourton, are one of those enviable people who may feel themselves of real use in the world. Those after all *are* the happy, the enviable people."

"You take a very different view of my case," she replied, "from what many—I may say, most people—do, I believe."

"That," he answered, "is highly probable; it being, unfortunately, the way of this world to call good evil, and evil good; more's the pity. But I certainly feel more and more every day what a happiness it must be to be doing something better than merely existing; something beyond the mere eating, drinking, and preserving one's life in as agreeable a way as possible."

"Well," she replied, "but if you really think this, what can prevent your acting in accordance

with such opinions? I should have thought you could easily attain to what you now envy."

"It is what I am intending, am really hoping to do," he answered; "I want to begin what goes by the name of 'doing one's duty,' and I suppose I ought to turn farmer, look after my property—my tenants, at all events—see to the schools, become a magistrate, attend county meetings, and a hundred things besides."

"Of course you ought," she said, laughingly; "and then I should think there can be no fear but you will find quite as many opportunities for becoming of use to the world as you could desire."

"I assure you I *seriously* intend to do all this; and upon my word I don't think I can be too thankful for an accident which has brought me into such close contact with your rector, Mr. Shirley. He is an excellent man, Miss Stourton; don't you agree with me?"

"I do indeed," she said, earnestly.

"He is a most excellent, sensible man," he went on. "He appears to me to be one who, while not ignorant of the ways of this world, lives as though he already belonged to a better. I have found him a delightful person to talk and advise with."

"And it is in consequence of all he has said that you have thought of becoming useful?" said Margaret, with a smile.

"No," he replied, "you wrong me there; it

does, I assure you, date farther back than that—farther, even, than when I first had the pleasure of meeting you in the train, when, if I recollect rightly, I was studying a pamphlet on—what was the title?"

"'Landlords and their Tenants,' I think," said Margaret.

"Yes, I believe that was it. Do you mean to say you observed it?"

"I did," she answered, "because I had heard it spoken of very highly only the night before."

"How curious!" he said, stopping short; "how little we either of us expected then to be standing here in this park talking of it!"

"No, indeed; for I, for one, had no idea such a park existed."

"Well, but to go back to what I was saying," he continued; "I have really been attempting what I have been advocating; for I have been in Nottinghamshire, where I have some property, which, owing to the misconduct of an agent, I discovered to be in a most neglected state. I have been living in a farm-house there, and regularly working at bringing things into something like order; and, do you know, I never felt happier in my life. So you see I have some right to tell you that I consider the workers the enviable people; provided, that is, they are working in the right direction. But there is the rub."

"Oh! but you cannot be doing wrong, and time and experience will help you to do better."

"Thank you for such encouragement, Miss Stourton, it will help me to persevere."

Thus talking pleasantly, and half seriously, they reached the spot where Lucy and Maude were sitting beneath the shade of a noble beech, employed in sketching the house.

Mr. Stratton remarked that he had often thought the Rectory from between the lime avenue, catching a glimpse of the church tower, would make an extremely pretty picture.

"Do you not draw?" he asked Margaret.

"Not much," she answered; "Lucy is the artist of the family."

"I think you underrate your powers," said Lucy, "as much as you overrate mine."

Mr. Stratton felt a great desire to have the said picture drawn and presented to him by Margaret, but he did not venture upon such a suggestion. She at the same time felt that it would be "good-natured" to offer to make the drawing for him, but somehow or other she did not make the offer.

The day before Mr. Stratton left the rectory, he with Mrs. Shirley walked up to Northcourt to take leave of the party there. They stayed some time, and it so happened that Mr. Stratton took the chair nearest to Margaret. He mentioned his intention of proceeding with various plans which his steward had been anxious for, and asked her opinion as to the merits of some new cottages which had been lately built on the North estate. She spoke of one or two improvements which she

fancied would make them not only more picturesque, but more commodious; and he seemed to think her ideas quite worthy of recollection and consideration. Certainly, on various other matters upon which they conversed, he appeared very much to like knowing her opinion, and they seemed to agree remarkably well in their fancies and tastes.

Mrs. Shirley at length rose to go, and Mr. Stratton had to say "good-bye," which he did as if he was quite sorry to be leaving every thing and every body with whom his accident had brought him into so much intimacy. His last look was for Margaret, as he left the room, and do what she would she could not prevent the bright colour from rushing up into her face. "Why was she so foolish, so ridiculous, so absurd?" she asked herself, as she walked up and down once or twice, and then stood by the window. Yes, there they were; she could just see that Mr. Stratton was walking backwards, taking a last look at the house from the spot where Lucy and Maude had sketched it a few days previously. Five minutes after she heard steps in the gallery. "Was it Miss May? Yes, it must be." How she longed to say she could not see her to-day! There was a knock at the door. "Come in," she said, hastily leaving the window.

"A note from Miss May, if you please, Ma'am; and the servant is waiting for an answer."

Happily for Margaret, it was a "put off;" Miss May hoped, however, that some of the party would

go and see her in the afternoon, as she had a cold, and could not leave the house in consequence.

No sooner had Margaret sent her answer, than, sitting down, she gave herself up to a short reflection, and ended by determining that she *would not* allow her thoughts to be wandering over recollections of what Mr. Stratton had said, what he had thought, how he had looked, &c. &c. "It was so absurd. Was it for one moment likely that he would ever think of her again?—Of course not; she never ought to have thought so much of him. But, no matter, she could not help that now; however, no one else in all the wide world should know of this great folly of hers."

The county paper mentioned a few weeks afterwards that Mr. Stratton, of Stratton Park, was one of the county gentlemen who had lately shown much interest in the improvement of those dwellings on his extensive property. Schools, roads, farm-houses, cottages, &c., were receiving attention, which indeed they greatly needed; and a sum of money had been placed in the hands of the rector of the parish by Mr. Stratton for the furtherance of various desirable objects, previously to his quitting Stratton Park to join Lady Vaux and her family at Brighton.

CHAPTER XV.

"O'er wayward children would'st thou hold firm rule,
And sun thee in the light of happy faces;
Love, hope, and patience, these must be thy graces—
And in thine own heart let them first keep school."

SOON after Mr. Stratton went away, the Shirleys left home for a few weeks, and Miss May also. Life at Northcourt was at its quietest, and might very truthfully have been called dull. Lucy had gone back to Teesdale again. Margaret did feel a yearning for change of scene come over her, and specially on the morning when she and her charges exchanged "good-byes" with the joyous party who were leaving the rectory for a month at the sea-side. But no murmur escaped her in writing home, and scarcely a word on the subject reached the ears of the children. The absence of the Shirleys was of course deplored by them. Oliver solaced himself with his carpentering. He was very ingenious, and he had completed a rabbit-hutch, with divisions and arrangements of his own designing, very cleverly. When Margaret and his sisters went to see it one morning, Fanny exclaimed at the beauty of a couple of black rabbits which it contained, and

asked Oliver where he got them. He coloured up, and laughed, but did not reply. Fanny and Maude begged him to tell them. He persisted in refusing, and his sisters asked him why he would not say.

"Because I don't choose," he answered.

"Then you are very absurd and ill-natured, I think," said Maude.

"And you are very inquisitive and ridiculous," replied Oliver.

"But where is your white doe?" asked Fanny.

"I've got no white doe now, and that's all I'm going to tell you about it, so don't go on bothering any more."

"Oh, you have exchanged it for those black ones! I did so love that doe, Oliver; I wish you had kept her. I would have bought her of you."

"Would you? Yes, I dare say, and have given me less than half her value, most likely."

"How crossly you are speaking, dear Oliver," said Maude.

"You should not tease, then. You had better go on after Miss Stourton. I shan't come to-day."

The two girls walked on, and joined Margaret, who had not heard the conversation that had just passed. She inquired why Oliver was not with them.

Maude told her he said he should not come.

"Oh! but I wished him to go with us this afternoon; run back, Fanny dear, and tell him."

Fanny ran back as she was desired, but Oliver was nowhere to be seen; she called, but he did

not answer; so she returned to Margaret, and told her she could not find him, and that he was not at the carpenter's shop.

They looked for him for a little while, but thinking he might have gone about some fishing-tackle to the keeper's, they went that way to the village. However, they did not find him, or see any thing of him till they were sitting down to tea, when he came in, looking flushed, and appearing very absent.

"My dear Oliver," said Margaret, "where have you been all this afternoon? This is the second time, lately, that you have not come in till we have begun tea. I wanted you to go to Bruton's with me."

"Oh! did you? I quite forgot about it. I'll go to-morrow. I know what to say to him. Give me some bread, Maude."

"Don't forget to say *please*, dear."

"I want butter, too, please," said Oliver.

Margaret put some on his plate. It was evident to her that he wished to avoid saying where he had been, so she would not then press her inquiry. After tea he laid himself down on the floor, and took a volume of the "Arabian Nights" to read. He looked very tired.

Margaret called Fanny to help her with a little frame, fastened with pegs, which she could not manage to put properly together; it seemed that the pegs were too large.

"I must cut them, I think," she said; "but I have only my penknife."

"Oliver has a great strong knife," said Fanny.

"Will you lend me your knife, Oliver?" asked Margaret.

"I—I—I've not got it here," he replied. "I dare say Charles has one; shall I go and ask him?"

"Oh, no! never mind now; I will use the thick end of the blade of my penknife. I hope, though, you have not lost your knife."

"No, it's not lost," he said, and again buried himself in his book.

His manner rather surprised Margaret, but she did not say any thing, as Maude came to ask her some questions about her German exercise. The following morning, when Oliver was alone with her, she inquired why he had not said where he had been.

"Maude and Fanny always bother so," he answered.

"Maude and Fanny always bother so!" she repeated; "I don't understand you, Oliver. I don't like that way of speaking of your sisters. I cannot imagine any reason why you should not reply pleasantly when you are asked where you have been."

After a moment's hesitation he muttered, "Mamma does not always ask me where I've been."

"Then you do not mean to tell me?"

No answer.

"I must not let you go out alone unless I know where you go, or unless you can give me some sort of reason for not telling me who you are with, or what you do."

To her great surprise he burst into a fit of crying, and said he wished he was at school; that Margaret wanted to make a baby of him, and he hated being made to do every thing just like his sisters. She tried to reason with him, but it was useless, so she told him to go up to his own room, and to remain there. He rushed away, and she heard him running to his own room, the door of which he shut with such violence that it seemed to shake all the others in the house. She was astounded; troublesome he had now and then been, and self-willed, but an outbreak like this she had never for a moment expected. She decided to leave him alone for the present, and she sat thinking over the whole affair, and came to the conclusion that something or other must be burdening his mind or conscience, or he could never have been irritated and put out to so totally unreasonable a degree by what she had said to him; and she thought the idea about being treated like a baby must have been put into his head, for she never heard him breathe such a thought before. When dinner was ready she went up to his room, and told him to come down with her. She went down stairs, and he followed her. During dinner he did not speak,

and Maude and Fanny had the good sense to respect his red eyes. As soon as his sisters had left the room, however, he said, "May I go to the carpenter's shop?"

"No, Oliver, I wish you to come to Bruton's about your boot. You had better take your English poetry now, and learn it in the library while your sisters are with me."

He said nothing, and she went up to the schoolroom: he came up too, and got the book, and took it down into the library, as she had desired. No sooner was he there though, than, putting on his cap, he got out of the window, which was close to the ground, ran round the house, and jumping over the palings, ran across the park as fast as his legs could carry him; then through a copse, down a little green lane to a cottage, at the door of which he was met by a lad of about fourteen years old. He was so out of breath he could scarcely speak; but after a few gasps he said—

"I can't come. It's such a bother. They *will* ask where I've been. I say, I wish you'd let me tell; mayn't I tell Miss Stourton?"

"Tell Miss Stourton? no, of course not; why, you ain't such a baby, to be sure? You *promised* you would not, remember that."

"I know I did, but I thought you'd let me, after all. I can't stay, or I shall be found out. I just ran out to tell you that I cannot come."

"But what am I to say to Peterson? He was to be at my uncle's at three o'clock, and I told him

you would be there. I've not got money enough to pay him."

"That's all I've got," said Oliver, giving him sevenpence. "I'm very sorry, but I really *must* go."

"I say, *mind your promise*, then."

Oliver had run several yards towards home before the last words had been shouted by his companion, and he reached the window, and got back into the library unseen and unheard, he thought; but he had not been quite as fortunate in this particular as he imagined; for it so happened that Margaret had looked out of the window of a little lumber-room at the top of the house, to which she had gone in search of an old shawl, which she intended to take to a poor woman in the village that afternoon. What was her dismay to see Oliver, whom she believed to be in the library, running across the park from a distance! She was so excessively surprised that she seemed unable to move from the spot where she stood, even when he was hidden by the trees, had gained the house, and ceased to be in sight. She remained some minutes deep in thought, then slowly went down stairs, pausing once or twice, as though wishing to be quite sure of having taken sufficient time for deciding what she ought to do. Then she opened the library-door, and Oliver started up from the sofa on which he had been sitting, as if she had detected him in some crime. He looked

at her. She went up to him, and quietly taking him by the arm she led him towards a chair on which she sat down.

"Oliver," she said, "when your mamma left England, she asked me to come here to be with you and your sisters; she wished me to teach you what was right, and to take care of you, and keep you out of harm. She wished you to obey me, and to pay attention to my wishes. She left you in my charge; and you know, Oliver, that it will grieve her very much if I have to tell her you have been disobedient to me, and have behaved very wrongly. I thought you would have remained in this room, and learnt your poetry. I thought, after what happened yesterday, you would have tried very hard to please me to-day, and I hoped I should not again be obliged to punish you; but you have now done so extremely wrong a thing, that, unless you can give me any good reason as an excuse for such strange conduct, I must of course punish you severely. Oliver, I saw you just now running across the park. Where had you been?"

His lips quivered; it was with great difficulty he prevented himself from crying.

Margaret waited. At last she said, "If you have been tempted to do something or other of which you are ashamed, don't be afraid to tell me what it is. Only think how grieved your mother would be. Tell me, what is it which makes you keep what you have been about so secret? If you have

done wrong, be a brave, manly boy, and confess it, even though you think I may be angry with you."

By this time he was sobbing, but she could not induce him to speak. So at length, taking him by the hand, she led him up to the nursery, and in a grave but firm tone she told Mrs. Watson he had displeased her very much indeed, and that she was obliged to punish him.

"I wish him to remain in the nursery," she said. "He must have his tea here, and go to bed at eight o'clock. If he wishes to speak to me you can send me word, and I will come to him, but he must not himself come back to the school-room to-day."

Mrs. Watson was very sorry. She said, "Very well, ma'am, I will do as you wish," and Margaret left the room. She was perplexed and grieved. It was a great distress to her always to have either to punish or find fault with the children, and she reproached herself for not having been more watchful over Oliver's proceedings during his play-hours.

"You and Fanny may go down to your gardens, and stay there for the present," she said to Maude. "I don't think I shall take you for any walk this afternoon."

When they were gone she went to the carpenter's shop, to endeavour to find out from the carpenters whether they knew any thing of Oliver's mysterious proceedings, but they could throw no light at all upon the subject. The keeper with

whom he was allowed to fish, and whom he was a good deal with at times, was away that day. All her efforts were fruitless, and very unhappy she felt. Oliver did not send for her. Mrs. Watson told her he seemed pretty comfortable till bed-time, and then she heard him crying.

"I must get to the bottom of the mystery," said Margaret. "I have been thinking whether he can have made some acquaintance of which he is ashamed. Is there any boy in the neighbourhood with whom he can have got into a scrape, do you think?"

Mrs. Watson thought and thought, but ended by shaking her head in the negative; she knew of no one.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh! teach him, while your lessons last,
To judge the present by the past."

MARGARET found it useless to attempt to persuade Oliver to confess his secret, or assign any motive for his strange conduct. She was thoroughly puzzled. His determined resistance surprised her greatly. He seemed to be trying her strength against his own, testing *his* powers of resistance, and *hers* of enforcing obedience. The whole thing was so unexpected, too; but she thought she ought to have foreseen it, and she reproached herself for not having observed that a storm was gathering. She tried to recollect what particular proofs of impatience of control or inclination to rebel Oliver had shown latterly. She felt half frightened and really wretched all the evening, and very little sleep had she that night. She woke with a hope that the coming day would throw some light on what at present seemed so dark.

Dinner was over, and the two girls had begun to prepare for going out walking; Margaret was standing near the window, thinking what steps she ought

next to take about Oliver, when a servant brought her word that the carpenter would be glad to speak to her. She ran down into the hall, trusting he might have some good news for her.

"What is it, Mr. Wynn?" she asked; "come into this room and tell me," leading the way to the library.

"Well, ma'am, I've been thinking this bit of a note may have something to do with what you were inquiring about yesterday. It were given to a lad who works under me. He had it from Mr. Rice's nephew, young Master Godfrey; a rare wild youngster, who is at his uncle's for his holidays. I don't fancy you'd like Master Oliver to have much to say to him."

Margaret took the note, and read as follows :—

"*My dear North,*

"*Peterson says he* must *and* will *have the black buck again, unless he has half the money to-morrow. The ferret died this morning: horridly unlucky, isn't it? I'll be at the grain-house at three o'clock, so bring the buck or the money there. I hope you will go to the fair with me; it will be such fun.*

"*G. R.*"

"He told my boy Jack not to let any one have the note except Master Oliver," said the carpenter; "but as I had to send Jack to Bruton, he took it from his pocket, and asked me to be sure and give it to the young gentleman when he came

down to the workshop; so after what you said yesterday, I thought I'd better just step up to you with it first."

"Thank you; I am exceedingly glad you did. I am sadly afraid there is no doubt Master Oliver has been led into some mischief by this boy, but I hope now I shall be able to find out the truth."

Before three o'clock struck, Margaret had reached the "grain-house." It was an old thatched hut, used many years before for keeping corn for the pheasants, when a keeper lived in the cottage close by.

She had waited but a short time, when a lad of about fifteen sprang over the hedge, and came round the corner, and confronted her. He started violently, and an angry flush suffused his clever, but unpleasing face.

"Godfrey Rice," said Margaret, firmly, "I want to say a few words to you; I want to hear from you the meaning of this note," showing him the one which the carpenter had brought to her.

He did not reply.

"I strongly advise you to speak at once," she continued.

"Pshaw! It's a pack of nonsense, not worth sixpence, from beginning to end."

"Then let me hear what it is, and what you mean about his going to the fair with you?"

"If you will give me three-and-sixpence, which Oliver North owes me, I won't have any thing more to say to him; now, that will do, won't it?"

"No; it will not do. I must hear from you the meaning of what you have written; or, if you do not choose to accede to what I ask, as a gentleman should, I must walk on to Mr. Rice's, and make my complaint to him; for I have reason to fear that you have acted the coward's part by leading one much younger than yourself into agreeing to do what he ought not."

After a short pause she walked on. She had gone about a mile when Godfrey, who had taken a short cut across country, appeared leaning on a gate through which she had to pass. He prevented her opening it by standing before the latch, but she jumped over more quickly than he was prepared for. He followed immediately, and came up with her.

"Be so good as to stop a moment," he said.

But she took no notice of him, and went on.

"You'll not go to my uncle's, please. I'll speak now, here. Do stop. I beg your pardon, I say; upon my word I do. No, no, I say," standing before her, "don't go down the lane; no, now, don't, pray don't, I do beg of you. If you'll stop I'll tell you every thing."

"You say you will tell me every thing," she said, stopping short, and looking quietly at him, while her heart beat quickly; "keep your word, then, and let me hear what you have to say."

He then told her he had first made acquaintance about a fortnight before with Oliver, who was standing by the lake in the park, watching a water-rat.

He had spoken to Oliver about the rat, and about some squirrels; and in this first meeting he had prevailed upon him to promise (on condition of his telling him a great secret) not to mention that they had met, for certain reasons of his own; one of them being the belief that Oliver would not be allowed to associate with him if their acquaintance was known. After this they met constantly, by appointment. His uncle, a wealthy gentleman-farmer, to whose house he had been sent from a school where he had distinguished himself by extremely bad conduct, was inclined to be over strict with him; but he was too much occupied on his farm to be able to keep a very constant eye upon the boy, whose widowed mother had found him quite beyond her control.

Godfrey had represented his uncle to Oliver as a perfect monster of cruelty towards him, and had told him, in a way that quite touched the little boy's heart, how he curtailed or put a stop to all his amusements. He was excessively fond of pet animals; and his uncle, thinking he wasted money on them, and also partly by way of punishing him for ill-behaviour at school, would not permit his keeping as many as he wished. Godfrey considered this a piece of tyranny not to be borne; so he induced Lady North's keeper to let him make a home for some tame rabbits and a guinea-pig in the old grain-house, and he had added a ferret to his collection a few days before he met Oliver. Having, however, neither money nor credit with

Peterson, a bird-stuffer and dog-fancier, from whom he obtained the ferret, he had induced Oliver to say *he* would pay for it; and he had further prevailed on him to agree to walk to Mr. Rice's to meet Peterson, that this latter might hear from Oliver's own mouth that he intended to pay for the ferret. Mr. Rice was going from home for part of the day, and Peterson was coming to the farm, Godfrey told Oliver, on a rat-catching expedition.

At first Oliver had been delighted with the idea of all the pleasure to be derived from the small menagerie, to say nothing of the charm which so much mystery added to it: but he soon found the obligation of secrecy a great drawback, as twenty times a day he wanted to talk of it at home.

With regard to the black rabbits, they had at first been purchased by Godfrey with the promise of speedy payment; but Peterson becoming impatient for his money, Godfrey sold them to Oliver, receiving in exchange the white doe, a shilling, and Oliver's knife; all of which he handed over to Peterson, with the understanding that the knife might be redeemed by Oliver for two shillings and sixpence.

Godfrey never told Oliver what the real reason had been for inducing him to buy the black rabbits; which was, that Peterson threatened to tell Mr. Rice of his transactions unless the rabbits were paid for without further delay. Oliver had at first been very reluctant to take them, much as

he wished to possess them, being unaccustomed to spend so much money as their purchase would involve without consulting Margaret or some one at home. But Godfrey succeeded in laughing away his hesitation, and in arguing him into the belief that it was silly and childish not to act on his own responsibility, telling him he was "just like a little girl," &c.

Margaret, as may be imagined, was especially indignant with Godfrey; and she spoke in such plain terms to him of his conduct, that he actually did look somewhat crest-fallen. She then told him to come with her, and take the two rabbits and return them to the man; and added—"I trust you may never again act as you have done in this matter."

He came back with her to the rabbit-hutch, from which he took, as he was desired, the black rabbits so prized by Oliver. When Margaret reached her own room again, Maude came to her to say that Oliver had been asking whether she thought a person might break promises if they never ought to have made them. "He is very unhappy," added Maude. "I am sure there is something he wants to tell you."

Margaret went to him directly, and told him about her having seen Godfrey and heard from him the cause of the secrecy; which of course put all further necessity for keeping his promises at an end.

Oliver was greatly relieved.

"I never thought of doing any thing wrong when I first made the promises," he said. "Godfrey told me his uncle was so *very* unkind, and that he had no pleasures and no companions, and he said he knew I should be sorry for him. I wanted to tell you all about it yesterday, and that was why I went out from the library. I had promised to go to meet him."

"It is certainly very right to keep promises, for, as I have often told you, it is wrong to break one's word; but while you are young it cannot be right to promise to conceal things from those who have the charge of you. Your having promised not to mention that Godfrey had spoken to you, is not the most wrong thing that you have done. Do you think it was right to *continue* an acquaintance with a boy of whom you knew nothing whatever, without asking my permission? You see how one fault has led to many."

"But he just talked to me that morning, and then he said I must on no account tell you or any one, for fear of his uncle hearing of it; and then he said he would tell me a secret if I would not say any thing about it; and I said I would not before I thought what I was doing."

"I can quite believe that, Oliver; but what you did afterwards is by far the worst part of the affair. What made you say I wished to make a baby of you?"

"Godfrey said so."

"And is Godfrey a better judge of what is right

for you than your mother or myself? You would have been far more of a man, and far less of a baby, if you had told him you did not mind what he called you, for you were determined to do right. I had thought I might trust you when out of my sight. I thought you would not do any thing of which you would be ashamed to tell me; but what am I to think now? Did you really intend to go to the fair with Godfrey?"

"No, I am sure I should not have gone; but he said he wanted me just to go to where the rabbits and birds would be."

"I am glad to hear that; but you see, Oliver, when once you allow yourself to be led astray, it is very difficult to say 'no,' however much you may wish it."

"I never will do so again."

"I hope you never will; but unless you really try hard to keep in the right way you will not find it possible, for you may be often tempted to do wrong by bad companions. It is temptation which shows us what we are. You made acquaintance with Godfrey, and then made a companion of him, because he tempted you into doing so; which may show you how easily you can be drawn into doing what your mother would disapprove. You thought yourself a good, obedient boy, I believe, while no one tempted you to be disobedient. If I tied you to a chair, and told you not to move, could I then tell whether you were obedient?"

"No."

"But if some one came and cut the cords, and begged you to get up, and you would not, should I then know whether you were obedient?"

"Yes."

"Then, Oliver, you see by what has happened that I can neither consider you obedient or trustworthy."

He burst out crying, begging her to forgive him, and saying he was very sorry. He did seem thoroughly repentant, and she put her arm round him, and drew him close to her, and kissed him. She hoped, she said, that God, who could bring good out of evil, would make him remember the lesson he had had, so that it might make him for the future more watchful and careful. She could not but feel deeply thankful that she had discovered and put an end to the acquaintance with Godfrey before it had gone farther, and she severely reproached herself for not having been more particular in knowing whom he was with, and what he was about, when out of her sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

"One sentence he uttered which I hope never to forget. It taught us the sole remedy against rebellious thoughts: 'L'humilité s'interdit les pourquoi.'"

LIKE the rest of his fellow-mortals, William Stourton found his life was not exempt from trials and difficulties. He had thought himself especially fortunate in becoming curate to so agreeable and kind-hearted a man as Mr. Leslie; but, before many weeks had elapsed, he would willingly have bartered a little of his rector's good nature for something more akin to asperity, provided only there was coupled with it a certain proportion of zealous energy.

To the young and enthusiastic few things are harder to endure than the imperturbable calmness of those in authority over them; who have either outlived the ardour of youth, and forgotten the important aspect in which those things they wished once to accomplish appeared to their young imaginations; or are by nature of a calm quiescent temperament, which, taking both sides of a question into cool consideration, prefers to remain "*in statu quo*," rather than encounter the troubles or

possible inconveniences of alteration and amendment.

Mr. Leslie was what people call, of "the old school." New plans, new methods, new ideas, about the right mode in which a parish should "be worked," he heard talked of on all sides, but without giving much heed to what was said. "Chimerical notions, most of them, likely to do more harm than good," he thought; and when on one or two occasions William, in all the fulness of his heart, spoke with warmth of his desire to try some plan which he believed would be very beneficial among the working classes, or ignorant poor of the parish, Mr. Leslie treated him almost as though he were a child, full of unpractical fancies. It was impossible to infuse any of the same spirit that animated the curate into the rector, who could not be brought to see things in the newer light in which they appeared to the former, and who seemed to fear that William was too much inclined to be a mere dreamer and proposer of novelties. Mr. Leslie checked him, gently it is true, but the check was none the less effectual, and William felt like a man walking with a chain round him, whose weight most unpleasantly impeded his onward progress.

"Here am I," said he to himself one night, as he paced his little sitting-room, "unable to do half the good I might. My hands are positively tied. I begin to think Miss Dacre was right! If Mr. Leslie had to complain of my idleness, or want of

interest in my work, it would be perfectly intelligible; but this—this is quite another thing, utterly incomprehensible, it seems to me. He positively prevents my working. He damps my energies, he thwarts my best endeavours, he allows me no scope whatever." And in this way he talked, partly aloud, partly to himself, chafing under the yoke, irritated by bit and bridle. At last he came to a wise conclusion; he determined to say nothing more to Mr. Leslie that could possibly alarm him, but for the next six months to work as best he might, according to the old routine followed by the former curates; "and then," he thought to himself, "when my most respectable old rector knows me better, and has had time to prove me, he may, if I turn out to be of the right sort of stuff, listen to what I have to suggest with greater confidence in me, and give me permission to try some *one* at least of my plans."

With this resolve he succeeded in calming himself, and he kept his resolution with most praiseworthy determination. It was not very easy work, however, to submit to what appeared to him such a tame and worn-out mode of procedure as that approved by Mr. Leslie; but, no doubt, the self-control and self-restraint involved in so doing were useful to him, and tended to strengthen his moral nature. He was learning to master himself in endeavouring to submit patiently to the will of another. And meantime his judgment was gaining strength from experience, and on many occasions

he could see how much too hasty he would have been if he had been permitted to act on his own responsibility.

Thus a good work, it is to be hoped, was being done, in and for him, although he was at present debarred from taking the active part he wished. Like Milton, whose blindness prevented his employing his talents as otherwise he might have done, William might reflect that

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

"Wait"—not in slothful inaction long after the hour has struck for the commencement of their appointed labour, but with willing hearts and ready hands, anxious to begin at the moment when the dial tells them that *their* hour has come.

It did not take William long to find his way to the hearts of his neighbours. He did not confine his visits to the poorest among them, but he was careful to make the most of any opportunity for becoming acquainted with the tradespeople and master mechanics; his hope being, that an influence would through them extend to those they employed. He had been much interested in a sad case of illness, the result of an accident, which had happened to a foreman in a large carpet factory. He heard of it from his landlady, whose sister was wife to the poor man. William at once went to see him, considerably to the man's surprise, and was most kind in paying him frequent visits. In this way he heard a good deal about the "hands"

employed in the factory. One day, while he was sitting by the sick man's bedside, Mr. Ashley, one of the owners of the factory, called to inquire after the patient, and came in to see him. William had not met this gentleman before, but an acquaintance then began which both found pleasure in improving. They walked from the foreman's house together, and on William mentioning that the manufacture of carpets was one of which he knew nothing, his companion begged him to come and pay the factory a visit, and he showed him over every part of it. In the following week he dined with Mr. Ashley, and met two other manufacturers, with whom he had been desirous of making acquaintance. Mr. Ashley not long after invited him to an entertainment which he gave to his work-people.

Soon after Easter the eldest Miss Dacre's engagement to Colonel Seymour was formally announced, to the surprise of no one but Mr. Dacre, who, walking through the world with his eyes shut to what passed closest to him, was beyond measure astonished when the Colonel proposed to become his son-in-law. The event had been pretty confidently anticipated by the rest of the world for many months.

The wedding was to take place early in July, and Mr. Leslie and William were asked to officiate on the occasion. Several friends and relations came to stay at Mr. Dacre's for the wedding, and among them were Margaret's friend, Miss May,

and another young lady, who were to be bridesmaids. William dined at Mr. Dacre's the evening Miss May arrived, and had the pleasure of hearing from her all sorts of particulars, and not a little praise of his sister.

Miss Dacre's wedding was a very smart one, and "all went merry" at the splendid breakfast afterwards, though every body thought it right to express a great deal of pity for Bessie, now the "lonely one." She however seemed to be very well satisfied with her lot, and to be consoled by the reflection that she had gained a brother rather than lost a sister.

Mr. Dacre had an estate about twelve miles from Dee, through which flowed a stream remarkable for its excellent supply of fish. A large old farm-house, called Hackness Hall, stood not far from the river bank. It had once probably been the Manor House, or principal mansion on the property, but was now tenanted by Mr. Dacre's steward. Digby generally spent some portion of his summer holidays at Hackness, and sometimes his cousins had passed a week or more there with him. The neighbouring country was extremely pretty, very wild, and well wooded. Mr. Dacre had once thought of building a good house on the site of the old farm-house, but after his wife's death he gave up the idea.

Digby, who had found out that William Stourton was fond of fishing, obtained permission to ask him to spend a few days at Hackness, that they might

pursue this amusement in which they both delighted, and William was well pleased to accept the invitation. He liked Digby, and was no way disinclined for a short holiday, which he had fairly earned.

They went down to Hackness in a dog-cart driven by Digby, and any one who had seen the reckless manner in which that young gentleman drove might have felt some surprise to hear that they arrived there unscathed! The weather turned out to be very well suited for fishing, but it did not prevent their enjoying several walking expeditions which they made into the surrounding country.

Mr. Dacre and Bessie paid them a visit one day, which was very pleasant for all parties. She was in one of her best moods, very original and amusing, but rather less unrestrained than she was sometimes; she was very charming on such occasions. As usual, she and William had some lively arguments and discussions; Digby stopped them at last by declaring he could not understand a word they were saying, "he never heard such a lot of nonsense in his life," and was sure while Bessie went on with it she would not know whether she was eating trout or mutton.

While William was at Hackness, he missed seeing a guest of Mr. Leslie's whom he would have liked to meet; this was Mr. Stratton, who paid a flying visit to his uncle of two nights only. He heard a good deal of William in that short time, however, from Mrs. Leslie, for he soon discovered that she was talking of the brother of the young

lady who had restored his little knife to him. The name of Stourton struck him directly he heard it. Mrs. Leslie was much interested in the short mention he made of Margaret when he told the story of the loss and subsequent recovery of his cousin's little keepsake.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Thy thoughts and feelings shall not die nor leave thee."

TO have got through her difficulty with Oliver and Godfrey Rice was quite a subject for thankfulness to Margaret, who really had been a good deal troubled by the affair. She took care to show Oliver that she was willing to trust him again to a certain extent, and that she should not revert to the past unless he gave her further cause for suspicion. However, she was, without his knowing it, more watchful over him. Real hard governess-work thoroughly occupied her now. She felt that the children were making progress, and this stimulated her to increased exertion on her own part. She wished to teach them as well as she possibly could, and to infuse a working spirit into her pupils. She succeeded very happily in giving them an interest in what they learnt, and thus they all went on steadily and pleasantly.

Week succeeded week, unmarked by any particular incident. One day, however, Margaret received a letter from her brother which seemed likely to be the forerunner of change. He told her he had a hope that before very long his great

"castle in the air" would actually alight on the earth, and that he should then want her to come and take the post of Châtelaine, as she was the exact personification of the phantom lady who had so long occupied that place in his hitherto *airy* mansion. He was perhaps raising expectations that might not immediately be realized; but the idea of having her to live with him, and of being able to give her a pleasant home, was such a great delight to him, that he could not refrain from writing to her about it.

There were to be some changes made among the clergy of the cathedral town in which William was a curate; and Mr. Leslie having spoken very highly of him to the dean and chapter, an offer had been made to William of a minor canonry, to which a small living would probably be attached; and so probable did this appear, that he had agreed to hold the canonry in anticipation of the living, which was likely very soon to be vacated in consequence of the removal of its present occupant to one of greater value.

Margaret was reading her letter a second time preparatory to answering it, when a note was brought to her from Mr. Shirley, who wanted to know if Oliver might accompany him on a longish ride to visit a sick parishioner.

"I've finished all my sums, you know, Miss Stourton," said the boy. "May I go? I'll learn my evening lessons after tea."

Permission being granted, he ran off, and Mar-

garet, putting her letter into her pocket, devoted herself to her duties with her other two pupils. Dinner over, they soon after went out, to pay a visit to a farmer's wife who had formerly been a nursery-maid at Northcourt, and of whom the children were very fond. As Mrs. Archer had added a baby a few weeks before to the farm establishment, the farm had become a particularly interesting place in the opinion of Maude and her sister; and of Margaret too, perhaps, as Maude had long ago settled with Fanny that one good point about Miss Stourton was, "she liked babies, provided only they were clean and pretty!"

The farmer's wife was of course delighted to receive her visitors. The house was the picture of neatness and comfort, and both Mrs. Archer and her husband seemed to be well contented with their lot.

During the walk home Margaret thought much of her brother's letter, and of the answer she must send by that night's post. "I can't put it off," she said to herself, "he won't think it kind; and yet, somehow or other, I cannot get myself to feel as delighted as he expects me to be. It seems very selfish, so unkind of me, so unsympathizing with him, poor fellow. I am of course extremely glad on his account. Why should he not have thought of Lucy, I wonder, who has not entered upon any special engagement as I have?" In this way she talked; but she could not really be forgetting that her father and mother would find it very difficult

to spare Lucy if she continued at Northcourt herself; and it had been thought a matter for resignation and regret, that she should be compelled to hold her present situation. Was there, then, any real though unacknowledged reason why she dreaded the thought of leaving, perhaps for ever, the neighbourhood of Northleigh, and which made such a pleasant home as that which her brother hoped to be able to offer her, seem in no way more desirable than the one she had at present?

She was sitting, pen in hand, hardly knowing how to begin her letter, when she heard Fanny saying in a low tone to her sister (the two children were learning their lessons for the next day), "Maude, what is a man of fortune?"

"Is that in your lesson?" replied Maude, looking up surprised.

"No; only I was thinking of it because I heard nurse saying it to Jane."

"What about?" said Maude.

"Why she said, 'I cannot say I expect to see him *here* again; you see the family is very proud, and he is a man of fortune, too.' I don't know who she meant; I thought perhaps it was that gipsy who Jane said she believed was a king."

"Nonsense, Fan!" said Maude, laughing; "why it means some one who is very rich,—I dare say with a great many hundred thousand pounds, like the Mr. Lucas mamma told us about."

"Oh!" replied Fanny, in a thoughtful way,

and then resumed her lesson, as Maude also did hers.

These words were not lost upon Margaret, who felt the colour deepen on her cheek as she said them slowly over to herself. She was sure she could have told the children, without any doubt upon the subject, who this "man of fortune," of whom Mrs. Watson had been talking, really was. The servants, then, had observed something, they had positively been talking of it. What had she done to cause this?—simply nothing; she certainly had not acted in any way that Mrs. Watson could have thought wrong? No,—of that she was quite sure: her conscience acquitted her most completely. "How very strange!" she said to herself; "more than strange,—how excessively annoying!" She could not free herself from the haunting impression that the person to whom the servants had alluded was no other than Mr. Stratton; and although she had fancied she did not expect ever to see him again, any more than the nurse herself did, still the words she had just heard had sounded so much like the knell of happy hours departed, that they seemed to make the supposition of her having seen him for the last time a positive certainty. But ashamed of her folly, for very foolish she thought herself, she felt she must rouse herself at once; so she wrote to her brother as pleasant and warmly-expressed a letter as she could, and when it was sealed and gone she was immensely relieved. He very soon wrote again in reply, to thank her for

her answer, and told her to summon up all her patience, as he saw there would probably be some provoking little troublesome difficulties to be got over, which might cause a delay of weeks, or even months, before any thing could be finally decided. "But never mind," he said, "I am as happy as an archbishop in the prospect of what I believe *is to be*, as far as mortal man can foresee. I met a man the other night at Mr. Dacre's, by-the-bye," he went on, "who told me he knew some of my sisters. He has met my father and mother too, he says: his name is Maxwell. He seems to be a very nice fellow: he told me a great deal about the part of the world you are in, and asked me, if I had time, to pay him a visit one of these days at some place where his mother lives, not many miles from Northleigh. He has lately become a partner in a great bank here. He says you cut him, or, as he expressed it, 'did not seem to recollect him,' when last he saw you. I think he was riding through Northcourt Park with some people called Nugent. You were evidently very cruel, and wounded his feelings deeply, poor fellow: I healed them to the best of my ability, and told him I hoped you were coming to live with me some months hence: *of course* I think highly of him, as he gave me a guinea towards my evening-school expenses last week!"

Margaret could not help smiling as the thought crossed her that her brother seemed in danger of laying the foundation of another castle in the air,

by means of which he meant to get rid of her before he had fully completed that into which he said he was hoping to receive her!

Mrs. Shirley called that afternoon, and mentioned in the course of conversation that Mr. Shirley had heard from Mr. Stratton. "Such a nice letter," she said; "so full of gratitude for the 'kindness' he received here after his accident, which he is good enough to say he looks upon as a blessing, because it caused him to spend a fortnight among us all here. He desires his kindest remembrances to the children, and to you and your sister, not forgetting Mrs. Watson, to whom he says he owes a great deal for the sympathy she showed for him, and the trouble she took with him. She bathed his arm, you will remember, that first night; she had come to see if she could be of any use, and I asked her to stay."

"Oh yes! I remember," said Margaret, and then she went to look for a piece of worsted in the drawer of a table which stood behind the sofa on which Mrs. Shirley was sitting: while looking for it she asked whether Mr. Stratton was at his own house.

"No," Mrs. Shirley added, "he wrote from Brighton, which is so full, he says, that he feels in a perpetual crowd, and longs for a quieter sort of existence; but he remains there, at all events, for another week, after which he thinks he shall probably go into Scotland. He wants me to write to him, and says I must mention every body he

met here. I feel half afraid of writing, but I must make some sort of reply, Mr. Shirley says, to one question which he has chosen to address especially to me; it is about Will. He wants to know whether I should be glad of a nomination to the Charterhouse for him. To turn to another subject," she continued, "do you know that poor Miss Edge is very ill?"

Margaret said she had not heard of it, but that she had been wondering how it was that two letters which she had written to her should have remained unanswered.

Mrs. Shirley went on to say that a lady who had called upon her the day before, and had been at Mr. Baring's house with the intention of paying a visit there, had not been allowed to go in; for the servant told her the governess was very ill with a fever, which some people thought was catching, though as yet no one else in the house had got it. "She had been ill a fortnight or more," added Mrs. Shirley.

"I am very sorry to hear it," said Margaret. "I wonder how they behave to her: they seem to be such an unfeeling set of people. She intended to leave them soon, and was making inquiries in order to find something if possible to suit her, and was only remaining on until either they found another governess, or she some other family to go to."

"Poor thing," said Mrs. Shirley, "I should not think that is a house one would choose to be ill in."

"Or well either," said Margaret.

"And I am afraid," continued Mrs. Shirley, "she is not a person very likely to find the sort of home she herself would like, from what you have told me about her; yet I think there must be a great deal in her character that would improve under the influence of goodness and kindness. That last letter from her, which you remember you allowed me to see, was written in a very much less bitter tone than either of the others which you have shown me. It made me feel, as I told you at the time, as if she was becoming more charitable and gentle, more happy in herself, in fact."

"There certainly is a great deal which interests me in her," replied Margaret, "but her feelings have been so warped, and she has insisted upon believing herself in the most unfortunate circumstances; and then, you know, she has had a manner that repels, from her appearing to say to every one, 'you are trampling upon me, but I am hard as a rock, and you cannot crush me, although you try your utmost;' and hard as a rock she has endeavoured to become."

"How terribly mistaken!" said Mrs. Shirley.

"Yes; I imagine it is the consequence of pride, entirely unsubdued by any principle of religion. I don't mean that she is positively irreligious, but I don't think religion has been any help or comfort to her."

"You meant," said Mrs. Shirley, "that she has never learnt to feel that even her position is one in

which she may serve God, and look for his blessing upon what she does, taking its trials and difficulties as from him."

"Exactly," said Margaret; "she seems to have no idea of any thing of the kind. But I cannot help hoping sometimes that she begins to look upon life rather in a different way now, and my own idea is, that when this is once the case, she will in time become a very different person. I remember how scornfully she exclaimed one day at something I read to her about being humble, but in her last letter she says, with a dash under it, 'I think better both of your book and its humility than I did at first.'"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Shirley, with a smile, "I wondered what that referred to when I read the letter."

"I shall hear more about her," continued Margaret, "if Lady Harriett comes this afternoon, which I think there is some chance of her doing. In a note Maude had from her, she said she intended coming if she could possibly get away for a few hours. She has, I believe, been very kind to Miss Edge, and I dare say she may know exactly what her illness is."

CHAPTER XIX.

"Oh! there are various paths and ways,
The rough ones and the sweet,
By which God's guiding hand conducts
His children's wandering feet."

"And now I sit alone in this room, and think of the mercies of my God to me."

IT seemed to awaken in Miss Edge curiously new feelings, to contemplate herself as the receiver of kindness so unmerited by any thing she herself had done, as that which had been shown her lately by Lady Harriett Colvin, and also by Margaret Stourton. She was sitting by the window, as she was so far recovered from her illness as to be able to enjoy the soft air of a beautiful afternoon. She held in her thin hand a letter in Margaret's writing, for she could not bear to part with it. "Doing as you would be done by," she repeated to herself. They were words which occurred in Margaret's letter; for in reply to messages which Lady Harriett had conveyed to her from Miss Edge, who was far too weak to write herself, Margaret had said she really must not be continually talking about "kindness" and "gratitude;" and had added, "after all, I have done

nothing more than as I should hope to be done by in similar circumstances." But Miss Edge had not been in the habit hitherto of thinking much of these words. They, like so many others, with all their deep and holy meaning, had been little more than an idle sound in her ears. But it would be so no longer, and she slowly turned over the leaves of a Bible which lay near her, that she might read the golden rule again there. The doctor who attended her had said it was absolutely requisite that she should have change of air; and it had been settled, in consequence, that she should go for a time to Mrs. Archer's, where she would be sure of the greatest kindness and attention, and where she could have two nice airy rooms at a very small rent. It had been an interest to Margaret to make all the necessary arrangements for Miss Edge, and she and the children and Miss May had walked to the farm almost every day lately, as they had been helping Mrs. Archer to complete the window curtains, and clean chair covers, &c., which she thought were required for her lodger. Maude and Fanny were immensely proud of their needlework, as between them they had made a very pretty muslin curtain with pink ribbon run into it, and had presented it to Mrs. Archer for the little parlour window.

"You will be provided with an object in life now, Flora," said Margaret one day to Miss May.

"How do you mean?" was the reply.

"Why, don't you see that you will become a

kind of sister of charity to Miss Edge? and no matter what the weather is, rain or sunshine, you will constantly be walking to the farm to visit her. Don't you know how often you wished you had something definite that you must attend to every day? Well, here is your desire fulfilled."

"Yes," replied Miss May, with her merry laugh, "always supposing, that is, that mamma allows me to go out in the rain, which she *never will* do; and that somebody gives me a new parasol to shade me from the scorching rays of the sun in fine weather, as I have lost mine, and cannot afford another."

"Why, you have got your hat, which surely will answer both purposes,—I mean as umbrella and parasol."

"A hat! imagine a sister of charity in a hat!"

"Well then, the only other alternative I can think of is, that instead of a sister of charity, you shall be a charitable sister, and I think you can have nothing to say against that."

"Oh! nothing whatever, excepting that I am not sure whether I possess any charity. But, seriously, I have an idea that Miss Edge would look upon me with considerable contempt: I fancy she would frighten me excessively."

"That you need not be in the least afraid of; and besides, she is a good deal altered now, I imagine, from Lady Harriett's account of her, and I really believe you will learn to like her, and she

will think you very kind if you show her any little attention."

"Well, we shall see; but tell me, what is she in appearance? as that makes a great difference to me."

"Why, she has good features, dark hair, and dark eyes, which had not a pleasant expression, I thought, when first I saw her; but Lady Harriett, who has seen her many times lately, says she is quite surprised to see how much nicer her expression has become since her illness. I fancy it really is the case; she is much softened, I imagine, though I suppose you think it too much like a story-book account. The Barings are all gone to the sea-side, which is a happy thing for Miss Edge; but Lady Harriett, who is kindness itself, has been constantly to see her, for they live very near."

"Which last piece of kindness itself, I have very little doubt Miss Edge owes to you, though," said Miss May. "You have not told me," she continued soon after, "any thing more about your brother and the living, lately; it makes me so unhappy when I think of the probability of your going quite away. I feel wretched about it whenever the idea crosses me."

"And you will be one of those I shall be very sorry to leave," answered Margaret, affectionately. "I hope you have remembered not to say any thing about it, though?"

"Of course; I have not mentioned it to a crea-

ture. The subject is far too unpleasant for me to be likely to talk of it; so there is no fear of my betraying your confidence. I wish your brother would choose one of your sisters instead of you; not that I wonder at his having selected you. But you will be terribly missed by every one here."

"It is not the *worst* evil you could predict for me," replied Margaret. "I am quite sure of one thing, and that is, that I shall never forget the friends who have been so kind to me here. However, I am not going directly. William seems certain of being presented to the living at Christmas, but he will have to put the house a little to rights, he says, after that. Those kind friends of my mother's, the Wilsons, went to see him the other day when they were passing through the town, and they have asked him to furnish his sitting-rooms at their expense; but he says he shall wait till I am with him to help him choose his furniture. I think it will be very amusing, going about to select carpets, and papers, and all the various other articles required."

"Yes, very," said Miss May; "it is just the kind of thing I should like. What nice people those Wilsons must be!—most satisfactory friends to have."

"They are so kind, and so good!" continued Margaret; "rather peculiar sometimes, though. Mr. Wilson told William they had found out, by making inquiries through the waiter of the hotel at

which they were staying, at which church he would be likely to preach on the Sunday they were there, and had gone to hear him; and they told him afterwards that his sermon was an extremely good one, but they proceeded to question him very closely about his reasons for some things he had said in it. It appears, however, that they were altogether well satisfied, if the furniture is the result: does it not?"

"Certainly," answered Miss May; "how fortunate for him that they did approve! When does Miss Edge intend to come to the farm?" she inquired.

"Probably next week, if she can bear so long a drive. Lady Harriett says she will bring her, but she could not settle the day so long beforehand, as this, you see, is only Tuesday."

"When do you suppose Lady North will return?"

"In her last letter she says the middle of October; and as this is nearly the middle of September, it will not be very long now, I hope, before she really is here."

"Shall you be very glad when they come?"

"Oh, certainly I shall! I feel quite a longing for it, and hope so much they will not put off again. I shall be inclined to write a bad account of the children, in order to hasten them. I don't much think Sir Roger will be here quite so soon, for he is uncertain, Lady North says. He was not

with them when she wrote, as he had started on an expedition with some friends a few days before. I fancy I shall like Emily North very much."

"Yes, I am sure you will; she is very clever, and what I call quietly amusing. I think if she did not control herself, she would often be satirical, for she has such a keen sense of what is absurd or contemptible. She is not at all anxious to put herself forward; consequently, I think, sometimes she allows herself to be too much 'walked over.' For instance, to see Miss Nugent's airs, and the way in which she patronizes her when they are together, often makes me very angry. But Emily merely says some rather droll, piquante little thing, in the kindest and most good-natured way, if I speak to her of it afterwards. There is something in Miss Nugent patronizing Emily in her own house which does provoke me, I must confess."

"Parlez du soleil, et on en voit les rayons!" exclaimed Margaret, "for here is no other than Miss Nugent herself; and who is it with her?"

"Her mother. Don't you know her?"

The pony-carriage stopped: the gaily-dressed young lady who drove it made the very slightest bend of her head to Margaret, and then shook hands in a most condescending manner with Miss May, as she said to Mrs. Nugent, "Miss May, mamma; you know her, I think?"

Mrs. Nugent, meantime, had been so intently gazing at Margaret, that until recalled to recollection of Miss May's presence she did not appear

to have recognized her. Margaret had observed that Miss Nugent had directed her mother's attention towards her before the carriage stopped. Miss Nugent began inquiring of Maude where Lady North was when they last heard from her, and Maude replied that she was on the way to Kissingen, with Emily.

"I hope we shall meet, then," answered Miss Nugent; "we are only at home for a fortnight, and then intend going to Kissingen ourselves. I can take a good report of you all, I hope. It is a great pity I cannot pack you up and take you with me! You are all looking very flourishing," she added, as Oliver and Fanny rode up on their ponies. "We are going such a good party. The Vauxes join us at Dover, and Mr. Stratton and his cousin. It will be capital fun travelling together; I expect we shall enjoy it immensely. If you have any thing not *very* enormous that you want to send, I will take it most willingly for you," and then, turning to her mother, she said she believed they were late; so with "good-byes," and promises to take "all their loves" with her to Lady North, she drove on.

"Oh, how I wish we were going too!" said Maude. "I do hope mamma will come home next month, or I don't know what we shall do."

"She says she *certainly* will," answered Fanny, "and I think we may be sure from her saying that."

"Yes; I do hope we may," replied Maude.

"How pretty Miss Nugent looks in that hat!" said Miss May to Margaret.

"She really does," replied Margaret; "I never thought she was pretty before."

"What a life of amusement and pleasure she leads! They are continually going about from place to place. Now London, then some English watering-place, then abroad, then at Milward, with a house full of people, then London again, and so they go on year after year. Should you like it, do you think?"

"I fancy I should for a few months," said Margaret, "or perhaps for one year, and then to be quiet again: I don't think it can be a very good thing, though, to be leading such a restless life. It must rather tend to make one thoughtless and selfish, for it gives no time for any thing else."

They had now reached the garden-door of the Manor-house; so Miss May saying, laughingly, "We ought to be very contented with *our* lot, then," they parted, and Margaret and the children went home.

CHAPTER XX.

"Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight."

"I HAVE a great piece of news for you," said Miss May, as she met Margaret and the children in the park one day in the following week; "I have walked up on purpose to tell it to you. My brother brought it last night, and says he heard it on the best authority."

"What kind of news?" said Margaret.

"Very interesting kind of news, I can assure you; a marriage, in fact, and you know both the gentleman and the lady. I will tell you the name of the gentleman, and then you must guess who the lady is. I am so curious to know whether you will guess right. I did not, I could not imagine who she could be."

"Well, then, I suppose you are not the lady yourself, at all events; but who is the gentleman?"

"Why, Mr. Stratton."

"Really!" said Margaret.

"Yes, *really;* now is not that great news? and who do you suppose the lady is?"

"I am sure I cannot guess," answered Margaret, as she looked back to see what kept the children so far behind.

"Oh! do just *try*, at least: I should like to see if you can find out."

"I am the worst person in the world to do so. What is Oliver doing?"

"Oh! never mind Oliver; it cannot signify. Must you go and see?" she said, as Margaret, without replying, turned back. "Here they come, all three of them, so do be interested for a few minutes in my piece of news,—it is very ungrateful of you not to be. I thought you had seen enough of the gentleman to take some interest, at all events, in him."

"Then why don't you tell me who he is going to marry, instead of keeping me all this time in suspense?" said Margaret, resuming her walk.

"Because I want the amusement of hearing you guess. Harry would not tell me till I had guessed all the ladies round, you among the number!"

"But I know nobody. Miss North, perhaps, or Lady Ann Vernon."

"No, no! Why do you think of them?"

"He is gone to Kissingen, and they are there. I know no one else."

"Well, it is neither the one nor the other. You are very tiresome, not to say dense, so I suppose I must tell you. Considering you got as near as 'a lady who is gone to Kissingen,' you *might* have

guessed right if you had but tried once more. In short, then, it is—Miss Nugent."

"Miss Nugent!" exclaimed Margaret, stopping short.

"Yes, actually, Maria Nugent, her very self."

"I *am* surprised."

"Well, truth to say, so am I; for I think he looks (if one may count *looks* in the scale of excellences) so much too good for her. But Henry says his estates join Mr. Nugent's; so I suppose they have met constantly of late since he has been more at home; and she is thought very pretty and *spirituelle*, Henry tells me; added to which, she has a large fortune of her own—two or three thousand a year, I believe—which, I dare say, throws a halo around her she might otherwise want."

"But is he not rich?"

"I don't know: there are various opinions about that, I believe."

"I never should have expected him to marry for money."

"Marry for money! Well, I do call that an uncharitable conclusion," exclaimed Miss May; "it is rather hard to come to that decision about him. One never can say who people will fancy. I dare say he is devoted to her, quite independently of her fortune; only that may be the golden frame which enhances the value of the picture, if he *is* poor, as some people imagine him to be."

"But you yourself mentioned her fortune as a halo, or something of the kind, so you should not find fault with me."

"Ah! so I did; but you are so much more hard on him. I never went so far as to decide that in marrying her he was actually marrying *for* money, and money only; not, however, that I know him sufficiently well to pretend to be a judge either way. You saw a good deal of him when he was ill at the Rectory, did you not?"

"I saw him several times," said Margaret. "What I meant was, that I never should have fancied her fortune alone would have attracted him, and I cannot fancy her at all suited to him—can you?"

"Well, no, I certainly can't; but it is to be hoped we are mistaken, and that she is more charming than we take her to be. She will make the neighbourhood more lively,—that is one comfort. I should think he must give up all idea of quiet from the time he makes her mistress of Stratton Park. I hope he is prepared for that."

"And I know, at least I mean I *think*, that he likes rather a quiet life," said Margaret; "but, as you wisely remarked just now, one never *can* say who people will fancy—and this is an instance of what great mistakes one may make in these matters. You are sure it is true?" she asked again.

"Oh! Henry says there is not a doubt of it. Don't you recollect her saying, the last time we met her, that he was going abroad with them?"

"Yes," answered Margaret, "I do; I was thinking of that; and yet, do you know, her way of mentioning it is the very thing that inclined me to doubt; but it may not have been settled then."

"No, I don't think it was; at least Henry thinks not. He fancies it was only settled just before they started; and now they are all gone abroad together, which, my brother says, shows remarkable wisdom on their part. He says the wedding tour should always be before the marriage, and should be looked upon as the test of suitability of disposition: so, perhaps, if it turns out that we are right, and they are unsuited, they will break off the engagement before they come to England again. But I must not stay any longer, for I ought to be at home early to-day. I am going to my uncle's to-morrow instead of next Saturday. They want me to adorn a ball-room with my presence to-morrow night, and I ought to go and see about my finery, so I must say good-bye. Is it not very kind of me to have brought you this piece of news to occupy your thoughts during my week's absence? And here is the book which I promised to lend you, and which I very nearly forgot to bring. I wish you were coming with me; you will have no one to tease you while I am away." And having wished Margaret and the children good-bye, off she ran.

"So this is the end," said Margaret to herself; "what a strange thing it is! How he *can* marry her! so infinitely his inferior in every thing! so

thoroughly unsuited, I should have thought, that even now I can scarcely believe it! Who would have guessed any thing so extraordinary? Well, it just shows me how mistaken I have been, and how little I was acquainted with his real character; for I should have thought she was precisely the sort of young lady he would *not* have chosen."

It was altogether a great surprise and a disappointment to Margaret, and she could not help feeling very sorry about it. She thought it so impossible Mr. Stratton could be happy with the sort of wife Miss Nugent would probably make him.

Long and dreary did that evening seem to Margaret. The children thought she had a head-ache. Probably if you had asked her if the evening was fine she would have said, "No, it is cold and misty;" but it was neither the one nor the other. Something seemed wrong with her; a vague feeling that things in general were out of order possessed her, and she could not shake it off. She tried reading, but she could not fix her attention, though the book she was half-way through was very interesting. She thought of one or two letters she had to answer, and sat down to write one, but she was some time in getting through it.

The children's exclamations of surprise and regret at their friend Mr. Stratton's intended marriage to a lady they none of them liked were soon over, and their minds occupied with other things. Margaret had again heard from her brother

William, who seemed bent on not letting her forget Mr. Maxwell, who, he told her, had become a great friend of his. He farther said that as Mr. Maxwell was to be at Sir Gaspard Howick's the week after next, possibly Margaret might meet him, if by any chance she and the children were going there.

"Foolish boy!" said Margaret to herself, as she read the letter over before answering it. "He and I certainly differ about Mr. Maxwell, who always seemed to me particularly uninteresting; but I must not tell William so, I suppose, as he has chosen to make so great a friend of him. No doubt he is a very good sort of man."

When Margaret saw Mrs. Shirley the following morning, she found she had not heard the news of Mr. Stratton's engagement, and she was quite as much astonished as Margaret herself had been (some might have thought apparently even more so), to hear that he was engaged to Miss Nugent. The only light she could throw upon the subject was, that she had heard somebody say they thought Mr. Stratton must certainly be going to be married, as the house at Stratton Park was being painted inside and out, and other improvements were being made. "I must say," she added, "that I do regret the choice he has made. I don't know her really well, but I have not much liked what I have seen of her. I know she is called clever by many people; but I always think there is a want of good sense in her conversation, and she is not as thoroughly ladylike as his wife ought to be. I

almost wonder that he should not have mentioned it in writing to Mr. Shirley. He heard only three days ago from him. I recollect now, though, that Mr. Shirley did say the letter was rather vague; and perhaps this accounts for it. His mind was full of other thoughts than those connected with what he was writing about, no doubt. I dare say Mr. Shirley will hear something about it at Hill Barton: he is gone there to-day, and was to call on Miss Blaney, who I know is well acquainted with the Nugents. I think she is a relation of Mrs. Nugent, so I dare say she will have heard from her."

Miss Blaney, however, was not at home, but the news of Mr. Stratton's intended marriage had reached Hill Barton, and there Mr. Shirley heard it from the owner of the pastry-cook's shop where he had his luncheon. The Hill Barton world seemed in no way dissatisfied, but, on the contrary, disposed to think as well of Miss Nugent as they had already learnt to do of Mr. Stratton. Hill Barton was the chief town of the neighbourhood, and Stratton Park being only a few miles from it, of course Mr. Stratton's marriage was a subject of great and general interest.

News reached Northcourt very tardily. There was no one to bring it, in fact. The village was very small, and Brenton, the nearest town, not much more extensive. People might have lived for months at Northcourt without knowing any thing of what was passing in the world beyond,

especially when the Nugents were away from Milward. Of course, it was very different when Lady North and Sir Roger were at home; but it was a thinly peopled neighbourhood, in a thoroughly rural part of the county, where the inhabitants were all agriculturists, occupied with home concerns, so no farther news about Mr. Stratton's engagement reached Margaret. Miss May did not come back as soon as she intended, for her aunt prevailed upon her to prolong her stay, and her mother found she could spare her, as an old friend was willing to take her place at the Manor for a few weeks.

Margaret had felt most thankful that she had not allowed her great liking for Mr. Stratton to increase. She had endeavoured most conscientiously to overcome it, but she hardly knew, till she heard he was actually going to be married, how much it had become a part of her very self, how great an interest he was to her, how much more every thing he said or did interested her than what others said or did. When she took up the county paper she had always looked for his speeches upon any local question, and had liked to see what he thought of the matter in hand, whatever that might be. If there was a discussion, she was inclined to think his view of a case must be the right one. She remembered words he had spoken, ideas he had expressed, thoughts that had escaped him, when talking to her, which were not common-place, and which she had fancied in a sort

of vague way had not been told to others, but had been only for her ear; but that was a pleasant dream, nothing more, as she had said to herself a hundred times. Well, and might she not do so still? Yes, she thought she should; but at first there would be a difference. She had long felt that he was to be nothing to *her*, but now she must add to that his being every thing to *another*, and that other one with whom she thought she could have no sympathies. She could not bear the idea that Miss Nugent of all people should be Mr. Stratton's wife. If it had but been Miss May, or any one more fit for him, she should not have cared,—so she fancied. And as the days passed on she became more reconciled to the idea of his marriage, and began to think of it as no longer amazing.

One day, as she was on her way to the village, she met a man whom she recognized as Mr. Stratton's servant. He touched his hat to her as he rode by. He appeared to be trying a young horse, and it struck Margaret that this might be intended as a present for Miss Nugent. A man was walking by the horse, and the servant was talking to him about it. When she went home, Oliver informed her that he had seen Mr. Stratton's groom riding a horse which he knew was to be sold. It belonged to a farmer near by, who had brought it to Northcourt for the coachman to see only a few days before. "Maude says she thinks

it must be for Miss Nugent to ride," he added. "Don't you think so too, Miss Stourton?"

Margaret said, "very likely," and that it was "a very pretty creature."

"Yes; just fit for a lady," said Oliver, who fancied himself a great judge of horses.

They were not invited to Howick as William Stourton wished, but Margaret met Mr. Maxwell nevertheless, for he and Sir Gaspard rode to Northcourt one day and paid a visit to the picture gallery, where the children and Margaret happened to be when they entered. The children were practising their dancing exercises, and by some accident did not know of the arrival of the two gentlemen, who made many apologies when Mrs. Bailey threw open the gallery door and ushered them in. Margaret was at the piano playing, to keep the young dancers in time. Sir Gaspard said the right thing would be for himself and Mr. Maxwell to offer themselves as partners to Maude and Fanny.

Mr. Maxwell told Margaret he had left William very well, and described him as very energetic, and doing a great deal of good.

"I dined at Mr. Dacre's one day last week," he said, "and met him there. He was trying to persuade Miss Dacre and a friend of hers to do some work in the parish. I heard a long argument going on, which I have no doubt ended in your brother gaining his point. He generally does, as I dare say you know."

"Does he?" said Margaret, "I am very glad he is so successful."

"Oh, yes! he is wonderfully successful, I assure you."

Mr. Maxwell asked if he could take any message or parcel for Margaret to her brother. He seemed quite anxious to be employed as carrier; but Margaret had nothing to send, except a good report of herself, which Mr. Maxwell promised faithfully to convey when he returned to Dee.

CHAPTER XXI.

"There stood a maiden near,
Waiting to pass. In much amaze, he stared
On eyes a bashful azure, and on hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut."

"THE BROOK," TENNYSON.

"And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought."

SHAKSPEARE.

IT was one of those quiet grey days when a warm haze seems to hang like a gentle peaceful influence over every thing. Nature was at rest, pausing for a few hours to look back upon the summer, which had scarcely yet passed away. There was very little to interrupt the stillness which reigned around. A shot now and then, or children's voices in the distance, echoed through the woods, but these were the only distinct sounds which could be heard far or near. Margaret Stourton was walking slowly along a green winding lane: she carried a little basket and a book; she was in a very thoughtful mood, and was reviewing the months that had gone by since she left her home, and came to live at Northcourt. In many ways, things had been different from what she expected they would be; and yet, in others, her life had passed much as she had anticipated it

would. She had been quite as happy as she expected, and she had got on quite as well as she imagined she should with the children; better, indeed, for she had had many secret misgivings at first. She had made new friends, too, some of whom she cared for now very much. On the whole she felt that she had nothing to regret, and a great deal to look back upon with pleasure and thankfulness. She had been happy, and had contributed to make others happy; and those she should be really sorry to part from would, she well knew, be sorry to lose her.

It was a pleasant thing to feel that her friend, Mrs. Asheton, had not, through her anxiety to help her, made a mistake in strongly recommending her to go to Lady North's; as far, at least, as it concerned Margaret herself; and, considering how well satisfied Lady Harriett assured her she expected Lady North to be with her care and management of the children, she hoped Mrs. Asheton would prove to have been an equally true prophet in that particular also.

Margaret's plans were not quite settled, as she waited to see Lady North before she decided exactly when she should leave Northcourt; but she thought of going home for a few weeks in October, when her brother William would also be at home, at least for a part of the time, after which he would take possession of his living, and she would go to live with him. She had begun to feel an intense longing to be at home again; and now,

as she went along, she thought how delightful it would be if she were walking through the lanes and woods of Teesdale, which looked perhaps greener and prettier in her imagination than they had ever done in reality. But this is often the case with what we dwell upon in recollection; poets and prose writers tell us so in variously expressed language, but we could all say we knew it long before we heard it from them. And very green and very pleasant would those woods and lanes appear through which she was now passing, when in future years she looked back to her walk of that day.

She intended to spend a long afternoon at the farm, and the book she carried with her was one which she thought would interest the invalid there. Mrs. Shirley had taken possession of the North children, to do honour to a birthday at the rectory; so Margaret felt quite free, and she liked the feeling. She went through Northwood with a light step, repeating some lines of poetry which she had learnt a day or two before. As she opened the gate to let herself out into the lane again,—the wood path having merely cut off a sharp angle,—she stopped to look at a curious insect which was crawling up the gate-post; and while standing still, watching it, she caught the sound of horses trotting, and apparently drawing some light carriage, far away on the turnpike road. "They are coming up the road, so I shall probably see who it is," she said to herself. She resumed her walk,

and had just reached the lane end as a carriage turned into it. A voice which thrilled through her exclaimed, "Miss Stourton!" as the thorough-bred horses were suddenly checked, and the phaeton stood still. Very pretty she looked as she raised her eyes to the speaker, who immediately lifted his hat particularly high, as if to apologize for the unceremonious way in which he had pronounced her name. He began asking after herself and her sister; and then inquired whether, by any chance, she could tell him if Mr. Shirley was at home, as he had driven over especially to see him.

Margaret replied that she believed he was at Farley: he had passed her as she came out of the park, and had told her he was going to amuse himself by spending an hour or two among the navvies there, having a little more time than usual to spare.

"Time to spare," said Mr. Stratton; "that would just suit me. I want to have a talk with him particularly. I don't think he would refuse me a quarter of an hour; more especially as it is precisely on the subject of navvies I want to see him. But whereabouts is Farley?"

Margaret pointed out the direction in which it lay. "It is just under the hill upon which that long white house stands," she said.

"Not far off, then," he replied.

"It looks very near," she answered; "but the fact is, you may have a choice of distances. Over the fields it is scarcely a mile and a half; another

way, by a stony lane, it is two miles; and by the road, nearly four."

He paused, as if thinking what his best plan would be. "I don't know how to apologize to you sufficiently, Miss Stourton," he began again, "for asking all these explanations and directions. You say a 'stony lane:' is it one by which carriages can go?"

"Now I think of it, I really fear it hardly would do," she answered, "as a hedge is being taken down in one part where it is exceedingly narrow."

"I don't think it'll do at all, sir," said the groom. "I know it well."

"I will walk, then," Mr. Stratton said; "that will be much the best plan. You say, I think, that by the fields it is little more than a mile. I suppose I shall not lose my way," he added, laughing, "and miss Shirley after all."

He got out of the carriage, and directed the groom to go to the rectory, and say he had gone to look for Mr. Shirley, but would return there. Then he shook hands with Margaret, and said what a fortunate accident his meeting her was. "Do you happen to be going towards Farley yourself?" he asked.

"I am going part of the way," she answered, "and I can easily give you directions which will guide you afterwards."

"I hoped you were," he said; "but the obligation must not be all on my side, so let me carry your little basket for you."

"Oh! no, thank you, it is so light; I really would rather carry it myself."

He did not say more about it, as she evidently chose to have her own way in the matter; but he began telling her of a plan which he was anxious to arrange, for the benefit, both morally, and (where necessary) physically, of a very large number of navvies, who were shortly to be at work on his property.

"It will make some land, which I only brought into cultivation last year, extremely valuable," he said, "as the line traverses a considerable extent of it; and don't you think," he continued, "that if it is to be benefited by this golden shower, I am bound to do something for the poor fellows who will be employed in the work? I am told I shall have five or six hundred of them on my property; and, in addition to their own claims, they will do no end of mischief to my people if they are not looked after, which is a further reason for arranging some plan for their comfort and general good. Shirley is such a practical, sensible fellow, that I don't think I can consult a better man. I want to persuade him to come and stay a day or two with me. I wish I could get him to return with me to-night."

They talked on very busily, for, evidently, there was no difficulty in finding subjects for conversation.

At last he surprised her considerably by saying,

"I never can forget, Miss Stourton, how much I owe to you."

"To me!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, to you," he replied. "This little knife," he continued, as he took it from his pocket, "has a double value to me now, for it marks an era. Do you forget? how you encouraged me to perseverance? how you told me to look for happiness in doing my duty? I know you said but little; but *what* you said that day when you found me in the Rectory-garden was like seeds sown upon ground prepared in some slight degree, perhaps, to receive them, but nothing more."

"You make me responsible for a great deal," she answered. She could not reply in a laughing way, for he spoke so earnestly.

"Let me *thank* you, then," he continued, "and I may say to the sower, that I now have some hope the fruit will one day ripen."

"Not me," she said very low; "thank God."

He paused a moment, and then said, "I often like to trace results to their source. I have a great idea, that if we did not neglect what seemed accidental occurrences, we should see that they are full of meaning, bringing warnings and help to us. It could not have been for nothing, that I had that accident which caused me to make acquaintance with the Shirleys, and with you; and it happened just at a time when my attention was turned in a new direction, for I had only had the complete

possession of my property for a short time. There were some rather peculiar circumstances connected with my father's will, which it is not worth while for me now to explain, but which hampered me for some years. They were settled a few months before I last had the pleasure of meeting you. What you then foretold has come to pass; for I find my time so fully occupied, that I don't know how to manage to keep a promise I made a friend of mine, to go to Germany with him."

"I heard you were going abroad," Margaret said. "Miss Nugent mentioned it the other day."

"Oh! yes; I was to have gone some weeks ago, but my friend found he was not well enough to start then: he has had rheumatic fever. He wants me now to go next week, but I scarcely see how I am to get away, unless Shirley helps me a great deal to-day; and yet I don't like to refuse, either. We were to have gone with Lady Vaux and my sisters. Do you know Miss Nugent, by-the-bye?"

"Only slightly."

"Perhaps that satisfies you?" he said, looking at her.

"Why do you think so?" she asked.

"Well, one can't account for every idea, you know," he replied, with the same droll smile she remembered in the railway-carriage, and which made her laugh, so much to her horror at the moment.

They had reached the point from which their paths diverged, and she had not yet found time to tell him whom she was going to visit.

"That is your way," she said, "across those two fields, and over a stile, after which you must turn to the right, and—"

"Do we part here, then?" he asked, interrupting her; "which way do you go?"

"I am going to the farm-house which you see among the trees. I believe you know, or once knew, the lady I am going to see."

He inquired who it was; and when she said "a Miss Edge," he could not at first recollect why the name was familiar to him, but when she explained further he said,

"Of course; I remember her perfectly: she used to be very kind to me. My sisters, I recollect, used to throw out dark hints upon favouritism in those days, and I had to fight my own and Miss Edge's battles too, that I might maintain a footing in the school-room in my holidays. And she is now living at that farm-house! How is that?"

Margaret gave him a brief sketch of Miss Edge's history, as far as she was acquainted with it, from the time she left Lady Vaux; and he seemed much interested, and very sorry for her. He asked if Margaret thought she would care to see him, and whether his character had suffered much from Miss Edge's account of his youthful days.

"No," she answered; "I think, on the whole, you may be very well satisfied. I am sure her

recollections of you are agreeable enough to make me feel no hesitation in telling you she would be delighted to see you, if you have time to come."

"If you think that," he replied readily, "I can hardly pass *so near* and not go and see her, for a few minutes, at all events."

"She will be so pleased, that I am sure it will do her good; she is often rather in a melancholy state of spirits, and I am sure it will cheer her very much to have a visit from you."

When they reached the house, Margaret went in first, to say whom she had brought with her; and Miss Edge was, as may be imagined, immensely surprised. Mr. Stratton stayed about ten minutes, and Miss Edge thanked him so warmly for coming that he could not but feel very glad he had paid her the visit.

"I wish very much that I had time to stay longer," he said; "I should like to talk over the days when you were living with us. You were always so good-natured to Fergus and myself."

"You and Fergus were always pleasant to me," she answered.

As he left the room he said to Margaret, "Would you be so very kind as to point out my path to me?" She went to the end of the little garden, and gave him the necessary directions; but he was wonderfully slow in comprehending them, and she had to explain more than once which turning he must take.

"I am so much obliged to you," he said at last,

" for all your help to-day, and particularly for taking me to see Miss Edge. I suppose she is very poor?"

" I fear so."

" And has no home?"

" No; none that she can call 'home,' properly speaking."

" Poor thing, how sad it is! what a comfort you must be to her! Well, I must really make haste, or Shirley will have left before I get to Farley. Good-bye."

" Good-bye," she answered, and he left her. Margaret heard the sound of his quick, firm step, gradually become less distinct; and when it ceased altogether, she went slowly back to the house, her eyes bent upon the little gravel walk which led from the garden gate.

CHAPTER XXII.

"My cup hath long run o'er
With blessings crown'd many and multiplied,
And daily from the Fount of Love supplied,
Upon my head they pour.

"Evils which turn'd to good
And wishings cross'd, which I have seen full soon
Had led to the house of sorrow: and thy boon
Of better things withstood."

"WHY, Margaret! I thought you must have gone with him altogether," exclaimed Miss Edge, when she entered the room again. "You have been such an age. Do, pray, come and tell me how it has happened that he came here with you: I am perfectly bewildered by such an extraordinary occurrence."

Margaret laughed, as she replied that she thought it did require explanation. "Let me take off my bonnet and cloak, though, first," she added, "for it is so hot, and then I will tell you all about it. But I hope you liked his coming. I thought I might feel no doubt of that."

"You brought him, then!"

"No; that is to say, only in so far as that he

was walking to Farley, inquired where I was going; and when I said I was going to see you, he seemed very anxious to come also, as he recollected you so well, he said."

"Yes; I liked seeing him," said Miss Edge, after a few minutes' silence. "He is very little altered; he has the same broad forehead, and wavy hair, the same smile, and very gentlemanlike manner. He is the first person, I believe, who ever came out of their way to visit me without a selfish motive. I mean, excepting yourself and Lady Harriett Colvin."

"Perhaps, though, it may not have been from intentional neglect; for you know, until I mentioned it, even he did not know where you were living," said Margaret.

"Exactly," Miss Edge replied, with her old bitterness; "they neither know nor care whether I am dead or alive. One may live months or years with a family,—one is expected to have their interests thoroughly at heart, and to work for them, to bear with all kinds of annoyances for them,—and what is the end? No sooner does one leave them, than it is as though one had never existed. Again one is thrown on the world without a friend among all those for whom one has spent the best hours of life."

"But, Miss Edge, from what I have heard you say, I fancy you would not care yourself to see many of those with whom you have lived."

"Care! no, indeed, certainly I should not; but

I should if they had been what they *ought* to be. You, for example, will always care to see the Norths, if you ever leave them. But they are such delightful children ; you tell me they require attention, and patience, and management ; I should like you to give me an example of what you call their faults. I want to talk to you a great deal to-day ; you said you could stay some time with me. The fact is, I am the better always for talking to you. I confess my faults and failings to you, and I am not annoyed by your telling me I am wrong and mistaken ; so I let you know the worst of me, as you can then judge better how to correct me."

"Indeed! and is that to be my occupation to-day?"

"Are you offended, Margaret, at what I have said? I do hope you are not. I have no friend but you in all the wide world. I do hope you will forgive me, and if you dislike it I won't talk in that way again."

"I am not in the least offended: what made you think so? I like you to say just what you please; I was only in joke when I answered so gravely. But before you do say any thing more, I must just show you what I have brought with me. It is a present from the children. I knew nothing of it till they came to me, and asked me if I would take it to you ; and I was to say they had packed the basket themselves, and that they hoped you would like the contents."

Miss Edge opened the little basket, and found that it contained some beautiful peaches and apricots.

"How kind of them!" she said. "Will you tell them how obliged I am. It is so very kind of them to have thought of me; and thank *you* too," she added, "for carrying the basket all this way. I suppose you have some peculiar power over the children, which influences them to do this kind of thing." As she said this she leaned her head back in her chair, and neither spoke for a little while. At last Miss Edge began, "I have thought a great many times of that piece of poetry you said to me the other day."

"I have written it out for you," replied Margaret. "Here it is;" and she gave her the piece of paper on which she had copied it.

Miss Edge read it over. "It is very true," she said. "This verse makes me think of myself,—

> "We speak and we read of the hero's deeds,
> And envy, perchance, his fame;
> We would tread like him some path that leads
> To gaining a deathless name.
> And we sigh, as our time is vainly spent,
> Oh! 'twas not for *this* that I was meant."

"It is that last line which contains the very essence of what I so constantly feel, and how any one in the position of a governess can help feeling intensely and bitterly, 'Oh! 'twas not for *this* that I was meant,' is more than I comprehend."

"But how can any one know what they are best suited for?"

"That is absurd! When I see people around me, in various ranks and positions, can I not form some idea as to their suitability for the place they are in? Can I not feel that a similar position to theirs may be the one which it would suit my tastes and character to fill?"

"Yes, I grant that," said Margaret, "at least as far as our own knowledge of our characters will serve us."

"And then," continued Miss Edge, "to feel the grating sound ever in one's ear. But, to 'this' you are condemned. Is not that fearful and terrible?"

"No," said Margaret decidedly.

"Not!" exclaimed Miss Edge.

"No; for it is possible, I feel sure, to have a lot in life which one would not have *chosen*, and yet to become happy and contented in it. I fully believe the other verses which say,—

"Yet we sit and dream of a better day,
And idly its coming wait:
When like the hero of poets' lay,
We, too, may be something great.

"For, alas! while we dream these airy dreams,
And sigh for the better afar,
We are dwelling in that which only *seems*,
While we slight the truths that *are*.

"The wearisome, lone, monotonous lot
Where to-day 's as the day that is gone,

Where to-morrow brings nothing to-day has not,
Nor evening the hope of the morn :
Oh, even here, in the loneliest hours,
Are lying some fair but neglected flowers."

"I cannot say I have found them," said Miss Edge. "That I have not searched for them, I am ready to allow, for I never believed in their existence."

"But," said Margaret, very kindly, "don't you think, after all, that it may be, on the whole, a better plan to take the best the present offers, rather than to live so much in a dream, which is probably never to be realized?"

"I don't see any objection to dreaming of happiness. If the dream or fancy pleases me for the time being, why should I not indulge it? If it is the nearest approach I can make to happiness, why should it be denied me?"

"I quite allow," replied Margaret, "that the power of imagination is one which it is lawful to use ; and I too often amuse myself in that way, to be inclined to deny day-dreaming to others. What I mean is, that to live constantly in the contemplation of a state of existence which, however much we may covet it, is positively denied to us, would, I should fear, tend to produce carelessness and weariness, and would cast a gloom of increasing intensity over the actual position in life that fell to our lot."

"I am glad you are so far reasonable as to con-

fess to day-dreams yourself, or I don't think I should have been able to listen to you any longer. I thought you were pretending to the attainment of such a height of perfection that I should be obliged to stay behind altogether. But I have no doubt that on the whole you are right; and, as I told you before, I do intend to try and see things in the same light that you do. Whether I shall succeed or not I cannot say; but if I do, and if I am consequently the happier, you will indeed have been a great blessing to me. I don't think, however, that you can always be a judge of the way in which circumstances affect my happiness. You are a governess, it is true, but yet your position and mine must differ materially. Every one knows that you belong to a family as well connected as any in the land."

"Oh, no!" said Margaret; "they know nothing about me in this county."

"There you are mistaken. I have heard it said on more than one occasion, 'She is a daughter of Captain Stourton, a cousin of Sir Edward;' or, 'She is one of the Stourtons of Hampshire.' They think differently of you, they feel an interest in you directly; and you are therefore treated with attention and kindness. Now who says any thing of me? No one connects my name with that of any well-known family. It is true my grandfather was a colonel in the army; but he was killed, and left his two sons unprovided for. My father had an

appointment abroad; my mother was the daughter of the English consul where my father lived. The climate killed them both, and my sister and I were sent to an uncle, who treated us well enough until he married a second time, and was governed by his wife, who hated us; and now no one knows or cares about me, or what becomes of me—that is what I feel. My sister has married because she wanted a home, and I believe she is happy. I have not seen her since she left England seven years ago, and she is too much occupied to write often. Can you realize what it would be to change places with me, do you think, Margaret?"

"Indeed, I hardly think I can; and yet I believe I feel for you most sincerely; though perhaps, as you say, I am not able quite to understand the way in which you feel things, owing to my not being tried as you are. But yet, supposing all you say about people's knowledge of my cousinship, and of my being my father's daughter, to be the case; why should that prevent your being as well off in most ways as I am? Let us suppose that we have changed places. Might not you, if you were me, be thinking continually that Sir Edward Stourton's cousin ought never to have been reduced to the necessity of becoming a governess? and that it was a very hard case, &c.?"

"Yes," replied Miss Edge, after a short pause, "I see that; but go on, you have not imagined yourself me yet."

Margaret hesitated. "Is that too difficult?" asked Miss Edge.

"It is more difficult than the other; but to tell you the truth, I was thinking that I should be so glad to be independent of an unkind uncle and aunt, that that fact alone would make me say, 'Come what may, with this reflection I shall make myself happy.'"

"Oh, Margaret! I only wish I had your happy, buoyant nature! then I might indeed be able to discover 'the thread of silver in the black serge cloth.' I will really try. I dare say I am sometimes punished for my discontent by being allowed to be more discontented. I saw something which struck me, and gave me that idea, in the book you lent me last week. It may be true that even this illness has been a good thing for me in many ways, though it appeared such a hard trial. I told you I always let you know the worst of me, but you must not think that I do not feel that I have much to be grateful for, in the very fact of my being so comfortably placed here, with a 'Marguerite des Marguerites' to come and see me, to say nothing of the visitor she brought me to-day."

Mrs. Archer now interrupted the conversation by coming in with tea, and she told Margaret she thought the home-made bread which she placed on the table would give any one an appetite, by which she accounted for the improvement in Miss Edge, who "looked better every day," she thought.

Margaret told her she ought not to praise her own handy-work in that way.

"I should not," she answered, "if I had taught *myself* bread-making. But you see, Miss Stourton, as I owe it all to my husband's mother, it is praising her, you know, after all, and not myself."

Margaret said it was a very bad excuse, she considered.

"Well, ma'am, you'll please to pardon it, then, and judge for yourself, I hope."

"I will," she answered, "on condition you bring in that fat baby for me to hold while you get the milk from the dairy."

"Milk, ma'am! you mean cream, I should hope."

"I mean the baby; so fetch him."

Mrs. Archer, by no means unwilling, brought in the baby, saying, of course, that "he was much too dirty and too heavy" for Margaret to take, but quite believing in the pleasure with which she received the creature. When Mrs. Archer returned from the dairy, the baby's neck was adorned with a blue ribbon, from which hung an india-rubber ring, which Margaret assured his mother would bring all his teeth through in a week.

"La, Miss Stourton, to be sure the things you do say, ma'am; and I'm sure I don't know how to thank you for your kindness. How beautiful he do look in his blue ribbon, the darling!" she added, as she held the baby up proudly before her, and then began to teach him to "*eat*" the ring.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"There is none in this world, even though he be king or bishop, without some tribulation or perplexity."

THOMAS A'KEMPIS.

"Serene will be our days, and bright
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
E'en now who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed,
Yet find that other strength according to their need."

WORDSWORTH.

MARGARET continued her visits to Miss Edge as regularly as circumstances permitted, and very glad she was to see her gaining health and strength rapidly. In the most delicate way Mr. Stratton had managed to assist her by sending her a small sum of money through Mr. Shirley. It was accompanied by a kind little note from himself, which Miss Edge showed to Margaret, telling her she was sure it was exactly such an one as she (Margaret) would have written had she been in his place.

"If you are always saying such flattering things to me," said Margaret, "I shall not think you safe company, and must give up coming to see you."

"Do you know, Margaret, to say the truth, I began to be afraid you had been giving me up? not that I mean to complain, for it is so exceedingly kind of you to come at all; only you can't think how I miss you when I don't see you for a few days, if it is only for ten minutes."

"Why, one thing that has prevented my coming for the last ten days is, that Fanny has been unwell, and therefore not able to ride with Maude and Oliver, or come here with me. There is nothing she likes so much as a walk to the farm, but she has not been strong enough to come so far; besides which, I did not feel quite happy about bringing her till I knew what was the matter. The doctor says it is a feverish attack, and he does not wish her to go out—for a few days, at all events. He thinks it is not of much consequence; which was a great relief to me. I should be very sorry if she was seriously unwell when her mother returned. I am looking forward to this day fortnight with a great longing. Lady North means to be at Northcourt the day before Oliver's birthday, the twenty-second, she says, if she is not prevented by any unforeseen hindrance."

"Have you seen the county paper?" asked Miss Edge. "Mr. Archer is so attentive in bringing it to me, and he pointed out this long account of a meeting about the new railway, because Mr. Stratton plays rather a conspicuous part in it. He made a capital speech. Have you read it?"

"Yes; Mrs. Watson showed it to Oliver, and

he brought the paper into the school-room this morning."

"Miss May and her brother were at the meeting, I see. By-the-bye, I was forgetting to tell you what an amusing visit I had from Miss May yesterday. She was here for more than an hour: she gave me some account of my old pupils, the Vauxes. Miss Vaux, the one I disliked the most, was half engaged to a gentleman at Brighton last month, and then she refused him when he wanted to bring matters to a conclusion. The gentleman went off in a great state of mind, and in less than a week proposed, out of pique, to a cousin of his, who showed great sympathy for his disappointment, and to console him, accepted him at once. Meantime, Miss Vaux thinks better of it, and writes to tell Mr. Smith that she has changed her mind, and is willing to marry him after all."

"I wonder how Miss May heard about it. She is quite the best hand I know at collecting amusing gossip."

"Yes, she is very entertaining. I believe Captain May brought the story from Brighton, where he has been staying with some cousins. He told her the '*on dit*' was that Miss Vaux wished to marry Sir George Churchill, the possessor of a hundred and twenty thousand a year, who unexpectedly announced his intention of marrying his coachman's daughter, or some such person, the very day after she refused Mr. Smith, to her cost."

"What dreadful gossip and scandal! I shall have to lecture Miss May."

Miss Edge laughed. "Ah! you have to come to me for the news, you see," she said; "but have you seen nothing of Mr. Stratton? I hear he has been several times to the rectory lately. Captain May was going yesterday to call on him. Stratton Park is putting into high order, and Miss May says it is thought he intends living there a good deal. Of course, every body will call on him now. Do the Norths know him?"

"I believe they do, or did, at least. I heard him say one day that his father and Sir William North had been old friends, and that he himself had met Lady North; but I think he has seen nothing of her for years."

"Oh! then, he will at all events call on her, or Sir Roger on him, whichever is the right way of proceeding, I suppose. I should like to see him again, so much. Are you going to the rectory this afternoon, by any chance? I want to send a little note to Mrs. Shirley; that is why I ask."

"Yes, I am, for I want to see her about the children going to Howick on Tuesday."

"Oh! to this laying the first stone of the viaduct, you mean. Shall you not go with them?"

"Not if I can avoid it."

"Then have I any chance of seeing you on Tuesday? It would be too much to propose your spending the day with me, I am afraid."

"I should like it exceedingly, but I don't think

Fanny will be well enough to go with her brother and sister; and the poor little thing will be so disappointed, that I must stay and make it as happy a day as I can for her. I shall see whether Mrs. Shirley intends taking all her children; if not, I shall try and get one of them to spend the day with Fan, if she is well enough to like it; but I cannot leave her, either way, for she is in rather low spirits, poor little thing, so I must make it as pleasant a day for her as possible."

"And you will miss going to Howick; what a pity!"

"As to that, I much prefer staying at home."

"Do you? Why?"

"Oh! for several reasons."

"How mysterious you are!"

"Four o'clock, actually! I must not stay a moment longer. I had no idea it was so late."

"And I have never said one word about what I intended, which is, that I am really getting so strong that I want to begin making inquiries about something to suit me. I must begin work again as soon as I am able. My finances are getting low, and, but for Mr. Stratton, would have been very much reduced by this time. You see, save as I may, I can't make much of a fortune; and I have really been very saving for the last few years."

"It is dreadfully difficult," replied Margaret; "I can fully sympathize with you; I feel it so myself. Money is the most terribly difficult thing to get and to keep. But are you really equal yet to

going out again? You must not overtax your strength."

"Why, I think I shall be in a few more weeks, at all events, if not sooner. I walked this morning to the cottages at the corner of the turnpike road, and went to see the old blind man there. I talked to him for a long time: he is so delighted to hear any account of what is going on in the world. It is quite curious to watch his interest in details of news from abroad. I was tired when I came back, but still nothing to speak of. After I had rested and had dinner I felt quite revived again."

"I will certainly do all I can towards helping you," said Margaret; "and perhaps I shall be better able to do so when I am at Dee with my brother."

"Do you go next month?"

"I go home, I hope," said Margaret, "at all events, which is the preliminary to my going to him."

Margaret walked very quickly from the farm to the rectory: she was later than she wished to have been. She found Mrs. Shirley surrounded by visitors; for, as has been so often remarked, according to the old saying, "it never rains but it pours," every body seemed to be calling there at the same time. She wanted to speak to Mrs. Shirley, but there seemed small hope of her being able to do so. She sat down by old Mrs. Radley, but Mr. Stratton, who was one of the visitors, did not allow her to pay Mrs. Radley much attention,

for he seemed quite determined to make the most of the opportunity on his own account. He said he was half afraid Margaret had not been well, or was away, as he had never met her since the day she had guided him towards Farley. He inquired after Miss Edge, and begged his very kind remembrances to her. He hoped Margaret was coming to Lady Howick's on Tuesday, and when she said she did not think she should be there, such a look of disappointment came over his face that she coloured slightly, and looked down.

She felt provoked and annoyed; annoyed with him—provoked with herself. And Mrs. Radley rising to leave at the moment, she took the opportunity of changing places with her, and so getting nearer to Mrs. Shirley, with whom she quickly settled her plans, and immediately after said "good-bye." As she shook hands with Mr. Stratton, he said he hoped she would be persuaded to alter her mind about Tuesday. She thanked him, but said she must leave it uncertain, she feared.

Margaret sat up late that evening, for two reasons. The first was that her mind was in a state of unrest, and she felt no inclination for sleep; the second, that she wanted to read over some things she had given to the children to do. She sat resolutely down to her work: she had a good fire in her room, and, with her lamp on the table, wanted neither warmth nor light, nor indeed any apparent comfort.

Although it was in her bed-room that she had ensconced herself, it was so nicely furnished and fitted up that it looked in some respects more like a little sitting-room. She had told the two little girls, that if they liked to try writing for a prize, she would give one to each of them for a short account of any four historical characters or events they chose to write about. The histories were to be very neatly and carefully written, of course, and were to be dedicated to Lady North, and presented to her in a pretty little case, which Margaret was herself to make for them.

She was surprised at the correctness with which the children had accomplished their task, and much pleased and gratified. She packed up the little parcels which contained the pretty prizes which she had got for them. This done, she read for a short time, and then sat watching the fire in a dreamy state of abstraction. All was still, the wind causing the only sound that could be heard. After some time, she went gently into the children's bed-room to see if Fanny was sleeping. The little girl awoke while she was standing by her; and when Margaret bent down and said, "Are you comfortable, dear?" she threw her arms round her neck and kissed her, as she whispered, "Yes."

Margaret sat by her till she was fast asleep again, and then returned to her own arm-chair, by her still bright little fire. It was not really very late; but every body at Northcourt went so early

to bed that it seemed late, and yet she did not feel inclined to follow the general good example, as she usually did.

"It is so wrong of him to behave in this way," she said, "and not let me forget my folly. It is not possible that he can really mean any thing. Why does he have that manner, then?—But has he? Am I not, after all, absurd to fancy there *is* any thing different in his way of speaking to me, or looking at me, from that he has towards others? How gentle, and kind, and thoughtful he was to Miss Edge!" There she paused deep in thought, but yet not thought which can be put into words.

At last, after exclaiming, half aloud, "Oh, how glad I am that I am not going on Tuesday!" she started up, and in a very short space of time her waking cares and dreams were lost in that best of comforters, quiet, deep, refreshing sleep.

* * * * *

When the party returned from Howick on Tuesday, they had much to tell, and they amused Margaret and Fanny with their account of all they had seen and done. Fanny had not gone with them; for although much better, it would not have been prudent for her to be out of doors late, or to risk getting tired.

"Oh! you should have seen the way Mr. Kirby pointed out to Sir Gaspard how he was to hit the stone," said Oliver; "such bowings and smilings. I was quite close, because Mr. Stratton took hold of my hand, and got me through the crowd of gentlemen."

"I was with Mrs. Airleigh and Isabel," said Maude. "Mrs. Airleigh said she would see I was safe, so Mrs. Shirley gave me leave to stay with her. We had a very happy day. It was such fun. You can't think how kind Mr. Stratton was. He said he was so sorry Fan was ill. He asked me why you did not come, Miss Stourton; and when I told him you could not leave Fan alone at home, because she was not well, he was very sorry for that. He says he is coming to call on mamma and on Roger as soon as they come home. I told him when we expected them."

"What are you doing with that bread, my dear Oliver?"

"Oh! why I want to show you how the stones were put for Sir Gaspard, and where I stood. Now, this bit of crust is me, you see; and that is Mr. Kirby, and this is Mr. Stratton."

Margaret, having listened to the explanations with great attention, suggested the propriety of eating up the scene, which, amid much laughter, Oliver proceeded to do; and this was the last act of the evening.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Now time has fled—the world is strange,
Something there is of pain and change;
My books lie closed upon the shelf,
I miss the old heart in myself.

"I miss the sunbeams in my room—
It was not always wrapped in gloom;
I miss my dreams, they fade so fast,
Or flit into some trivial past."

A. PROCTOR.

"And sometimes when the day was o'er,
Call up the tender past again—
Its painful joy, its happy pain,
And live it over yet once more."

LEGENDS AND LYRICS.

FOR several days Margaret had had no letters, and she was beginning to be afraid every body had forgotten her. The weather, too, was unusually gloomy, and therefore not calculated to assist in cheering her. Half-past eight had struck, one morning, on the great hall-clock, as with her face leaning on her hands, and her elbows on the window-ledge, she watched the little post-boy wrestling manfully

with the wind in a bold endeavour to keep his old umbrella over his head.

It was raining heavily, and the last autumn leaves were being carried to their rest amid the dank grass beneath the noble trees, on whose branches they had so lately danced in the summer sunshine. With a sigh Margaret left the window, and went into the school-room.

"Letters, letters, and plenty to-day, at all events," said Oliver, as he scattered them down on the table.

There were an unusual number, certainly; three for Margaret, one being from her sister, one from Miss May, and one from Lady North, besides several for the children.

Margaret glanced hastily over her sister's, to see whether it contained any thing of special interest, and then laying it aside to read again afterwards, she opened Lady North's. The expression of her face, which had brightened very much, now changed to one of alarm and sorrow. Lady North wrote in deep grief. Her daughter, she said, had become suddenly much worse, and all her hopes of returning to England were again completely at an end. Emily had received a terrible shock in consequence of seeing her brother carried, apparently dead, past the window at which she was sitting. He had been out with some friends on a mountain excursion, and had fallen accidentally from a considerable height; but although very much hurt, and rendered quite insensible for many

hours, he had not been so much injured as at first seemed inevitable, and he had escaped the serious consequences which were at first apprehended from his fall. He was soon pronounced to be doing well, but the shock had been greater than Emily's weak frame could stand, and her state was most precarious. At first it appeared impossible that she could live more than a few days; but she had slightly rallied, and might yet linger weeks, and even months; it was impossible to guess which way it was most likely to be. The rest of Lady North's letter contained an earnest entreaty that Margaret "would not desert her poor children at home." She could not say, she added, how much she should be comforted by the thought that they would still be under Margaret's care, and she almost implored her to remain at Northcourt. She should be eternally grateful to her, she said, for she knew that she was asking her to make no small sacrifice; yet she could not but hope such an entreaty would not be refused, considering the very sad and trying circumstances under which it was made.

Margaret did not take long to make up her mind as to the reply she should send. She felt much grieved for Lady North; and it appeared to her that to refuse an entreaty so made, and at such a time, would be the height of unkindness. She immediately wrote to her parents to ask their consent to her remaining where she was, and at the same time she enclosed Lady North's letter.

Breaking the news contained in it to the children

was a very sad task: she called them to her, and taking Fanny on her knee, and putting an arm round Maude, while Oliver stood by her side, she told them in a gentle, tender manner of the change in their mother's plans, and the causes of it. They all cried. Margaret's tears had been very near the surface for several days. She had been, she scarcely knew why, unusually out of spirits. They were a very sad little group indeed. But Margaret's promise to stay longer with them, if she could get leave from home to do so, was wonderfully consolatory to the children, and the affectionate, grateful thanks they gave her were a consolation and pleasure to herself.

During that and the following day the children were quiet and subdued; but Margaret had no wish to see them melancholy, and she did not check them when, forgetting their griefs for a while, they again laughed and played. In the evenings she read to them, and sometimes they talked together of "mamma," and all she had to do and to bear; and of Emily's cheerfulness and patience, as described by Lady North; and of Sir Roger, and the merciful escape he had had of losing his life, or of maiming himself, in his terrible fall.

At the end of the week another letter from Lady North gave an improved account of Sir Roger, but a less favourable one of Emily. There was also one from Emily herself, which she had dictated. Such a pretty letter it was: it contained various

directions to her sisters and Oliver, about the things she had left at home, and messages to the servants, and to some of the poor people. The children were extremely interested in carrying out her wishes with prompt exactness, and all three wrote to her in reply.

The letters which Margaret received from home in answer to hers were a considerable trial to her. Her parents did not refuse their consent to her remaining on at Northcourt, though they did not at all enter into her feelings about doing so. It was plain that they were much disappointed. Her brother William seemed to be positively annoyed about it. He said he began to wonder whether she intended leaving Northcourt at all; and he wrote as if he was vexed with her for not having at once said she could not stay. He evidently thought Lady North was asking too much of her.

It seemed strange that he should write in this strain, and not enter a little more into the sad and trying circumstances which had induced Lady North to entreat Margaret to remain, or into the sympathy for the mother, and affection for her children, which had made Margaret consent to do so. One excuse for him might be found in the fact that he had never been quite able to reconcile himself to her being a governess; and he had been very desirous to take her to a home of his own, partly because he wished to prevent her from continuing that employment.

But after thinking the matter over seriously, Margaret decided on remaining, notwithstanding the discouraging letters she had received. It was so impossible for her own people quite to understand the matter as she did. They had not lived nearly a year with the children, and constantly corresponded with their mother; and could not feel for the family as Margaret did; added to which, neither her parents nor William seemed to think she was actually wrong in deciding to stay. So she wrote a letter expressive of great sympathy to Lady North, and said she would continue on at Northcourt, at all events, for several weeks longer, though she could not make a permanent engagement.

This satisfied both her parents and William, who seemed to feel he had been too hasty in his judgment of Lady North, and to consider he had been somewhat unreasonably put out; for he wrote her a very kind letter a few days afterwards.

Margaret missed Miss Edge more than she had any idea she should, and Miss May was still away. Miss Edge was gone to an old friend of Lady Harriett Colvin. They were to see how they suited one another; and, if their mutual impressions were favourable, Miss Edge intended to engage herself as companion to the old lady for a few months. It was Margaret's turn now to realize more than she had hitherto done, the trying reality of that

> "Wearisome, lone, monotonous lot
> Where to-day 's as the day that is gone," &c. &c.

about which she and Miss Edge had had that long talk not many weeks ago.

Say what you will, it was weary work, and very dull at Northcourt now. The dark, cold, damp of autumn was just sinking into the cheerlessness of winter. The house was so quiet and grave. A cloud of sadness hung over it.

Margaret found Maude one afternoon in what had been Emily's little room; she could not think where the child had hidden herself, and observing as she passed that the door was not quite closed, she looked into the room: there was Maude, crying over some of the little pictures and ornaments which had been left in her charge by her sister, while she carefully wiped and dusted them.

"Why am I so selfish as to be letting a gloomy discontent weigh on my spirits, while this child, who has much more to make her sad, has no one but me to sympathize with her and cheer her?" said Margaret; and she reproached herself severely for want of thought and tenderness.

Maude was so fond of Margaret that a few kind loving words always made her feel glad, even in the midst of sorrow. Margaret had found her very companionable, too, of late, and she was not only extremely fond of her, but exceedingly interested in her. Maude's was no common character, and her very shyness, accompanied as it was with so much deep feeling, made her peculiarly attractive.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Nor with thy share of work be vexed;
Though incomplete and even perplext,
It fits exactly to the next.

"Thy life that has been dropped aside
Into time's stream, may stir the tide
In rippled circles spreading wide."

LEGENDS AND LYRICS.

"A LETTER from mamma, Miss Stourton," said Fanny, knocking at Margaret's door one morning; "and one from your home also."

Mrs. Stourton was ill, and most desirous to have Margaret with her again. She was in a very nervous state, accompanied with low fever, and Captain Stourton begged that Margaret would come as soon as she could. She wrote at once, and said she hoped to be at home that day week; unless, indeed, her mother was so unwell as to make her father wish her to come sooner. In his answer, he said her mother had been better from the moment she had heard Margaret's day for returning was fixed.

It was on the first Tuesday in November that Margaret travelled with the children and Mrs. Watson to London, and there gave them up to the

care of a confidential old courier, under whose protection they were to proceed to Dover, and thence to Italy. Just one year had elapsed since she had travelled by that same road to undertake the duties which she was now relinquishing, and it was impossible not to feel very intensely the moment that consigned to the past her year of governess life.

When Margaret once more stepped across the threshold of her own home, how strangely changed every thing looked. Her eyes had become accustomed to large and lofty rooms, and how tiny the little drawing-room at Teesdale now appeared to be. Lucy and Katie, too, seemed somewhat altered, though Lucy was certainly prettier than ever, and looked well, but Katie was sadly delicate and fragile. Captain Stourton looked older, she thought, and very wan and pale; but a smile of warm welcome, most pleasant to see, was on every face.

Mrs. Stourton was in her own room, and indeed she was far too unwell to leave it. Margaret was soon with her, and was greeted on her entrance by a look of pleasure and satisfaction which was even beyond what she had anticipated. Very glad did she feel that she had not been induced to go abroad with the North children two or three weeks before, when some such plan appeared to have been in Lady North's mind.

Margaret had been so long absent, that it was some little time before she could once more resume

her old home occupations, and not feel as if she was only a visitor. Her father and mother observed this, and rejoiced that she had not remained still longer away from them. They did not know how to part with her again, and she came to the conclusion that it would be best for her to remain with them for some months, at all events; so, after a family conclave, it was decided that Lucy should go to William first, and early in the spring of the new year she was installed as mistress of his little home.

Not long after this, Captain and Mrs. Stourton, with Margaret and Katie, left England for a cheap watering-place in the south of France. It was a step which they hoped might prove a wise one for several good reasons.

So careful and self-denying had Margaret been, that she had saved nearly fifty pounds, without including the additional fifteen which Lady North had placed to her account when she paid in her last quarter. In a letter which she wrote at the same time, she said she hoped Margaret would accept it as a small token of the very grateful recollection she should always retain of the year which Margaret had spent with her dear children at Northcourt.

* * * * *

Margaret frequently heard from the Norths, and from Miss Edge, and now and then from Mrs. Shirley, who could not be expected to be a very good correspondent, considering the multitude of

things she had to attend to with such a large family of children.

Miss Edge was in very comfortable quarters with Lady Harriett Colvin's friend, but she was still hoping one day to resume her old occupation, as her salary as "companion" was very small.

Emily North died at the end of November. Lady North came to England for a few weeks in January, and then returned to the continent, for the sake of the children, to whom she thought it would be advantageous to be some time longer abroad.

Mrs. Shirley appeared to have seen very little of Mr. Stratton. He was so much engaged in various ways that he had no time for paying visits, especially since his election as member for Hill Barton. He had intended to go to Norway after the session was over, for shooting and fishing; but his uncle, Lord Forfar, who was going on a special mission to Russia, asked him to accompany him as private secretary, which he consented to do.

Katie asked Margaret one day how much longer she meant to "look at that card," which appeared to have some peculiar fascinating property, by the way in which her eyes dwelt upon it.

Margaret gave a little start; her thoughts had travelled back to a bright scene and a pleasant hour. It was the card Mr. Stratton gave her at Howick, on which he had written his direction when she promised to return his knife to him. With a little sigh, and a smile that faded as it

came, she put it back into her desk. Ever since she parted with the knife, its place had been occupied by the card. Locking her desk, she put it away, and went to prepare for her daily walk with her father. Her pleasant, cheerful manner, always did him good, and he generally returned in much better spirits than when he went out: she always did her very best to amuse him. After the walk, she sat down to needlework for the rest of the evening, excepting only the half-hour spent in singing some of Mrs. Stourton's favourite songs.

The place in which they were staying had few attractions; but it certainly had one great merit, it agreed surprisingly well with the whole party, and Katie had not looked so well for years.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Much of the ability to do good is in the disposition to do it."

LADY Vaux had had a house in town for the season, and she had enjoyed the pleasure of more of her son's society than usual,—a circumstance of which she had been careful to make the most. She was really both fond and proud of him, and was very anxious he should assume a more prominent position than he had hitherto done.

She was most desirous that he should find a wife; and she had proposed various young ladies to him as eligible,—some because they had large fortunes, others on account of their beauty, some because they were of high rank, and one or two who possessed all three of these desirable qualifications. She had the satisfaction of seeing him dance and even converse with some of them; and she had fully made up her mind that he had fixed on Lady Magnolia Beauchamp, who was precisely the daughter-in-law she would like him to have. He went off with Lord Forfar to Russia, however,

without having brought matters to a conclusion, which Lady Vaux thought a great pity.

His sisters doubted his really caring for Lady Magnolia, and mentioned many little circumstances, and brought forward various arguments as proofs of the correctness of their judgment in the matter; all which was rather aggravating to Lady Vaux, who was determined to have no doubts at all.

They said they believed his new duties in parliament engrossed so much of his attention, that he had not been able to spare half the amount required to secure for himself the possession of so admired a young lady as Lady Magnolia was on all hands admitted to be.

"Why, mamma," said Miss Vaux, "only consider what I saw with my own eyes two nights before Greville left England. You remember we were at the Duchess of Mountberry's. Well, I was close to them both at one time, and he saw she was not dancing, and he not only did not ask her to dance, but did not even speak to her, and—"

"Why, my dear!" exclaimed Lady Vaux, "it was on that very evening that I was so especially struck with his manner towards her. I did not know he had arrived, when I suddenly saw him dart across the room to speak to her: they said a few words; she looked charmed, and then in two minutes more they were whirling round the room in a valse,—a dance which, as you all know, he hates. He had just come from the House, and

she was the very first person he danced with. I was particularly struck by it, because I thought he would be naturally feeling tired after such a long debate as there had been that evening: of course, as for some unaccountable reason he did not intend to propose before he went to Russia, he from motives of delicacy did not like to be too marked in his attentions, and you know what peculiarly chivalrous notions he has on those subjects. I have not the slightest doubt as to the state of his feelings towards her. My only doubt is, whether his confidence in himself, in his position, in his worth, is not insufficient to give him courage to speak. He is so good and so superior in every way, that I must say it is a trial to me to see how very little he appreciates himself. There is no man in England with whom Lady Magnolia ought to be more proud to ally herself, if he would but believe it."

"Well, mamma, there is time yet, you know," said one of her daughters.

"Yes, dear, you are right; and I hope we shall all show Magnolia how ready we are to receive her among us. I shall take care she shall not forget him during his absence."

Immediately on his return from Russia Mr. Stratton went to Stratton Park, where his mother and sisters, and Sir John Vaux, and a large party whom Lady Vaux had with her son's permission invited, were already assembled, and among them were Lady Beauchamp and her beautiful daughter. The

county races and a grand race ball occupied the attention of the party during the following week, and the neighbourhood was in consequence very gay.

At length Northcourt House was again inhabited, and one of the first people to call there after the family had returned was Mr. Stratton. The servant answered his inquiries for Lady North and Sir Roger by saying neither were at home, and Mr. Stratton next inquired for Miss Stourton.

"Miss Stourton?" said the butler, who had only been a week in the house.

"Yes, Miss Stourton, the—the—What is the name of the governess?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, sir, that is not her name. She is a German lady, Miss Kücken, or something like it, is her name, but I can't pronounce it."

Mr. Stratton turned his horse's head from the door, and rode slowly across the park. He looked unusually grave. Very slowly he rode up the long lane leading to the farm where Miss Edge had once lodged. When he reached the four cross roads he paused. Then he turned to the right, and finally stopped at the gate of the farm-house, and inquired of Mrs. Archer, who was in her garden, whether Miss Edge had been there lately.

"Yes, sir, she was here for a fortnight last month."

"And how is she now?" he asked.

"Oh! quite strong, sir; so different from what

she was last year, when Miss Stourton and the young ladies used to come so often to see her."

"I am very glad to hear it. Do you know, by-the-bye, what has become of that Miss Stourton?"

"I believe she is gone to France, sir. Her family live there now, I think."

"What! have they left England altogether?"

"Well, I really can't say for certain, sir, but I think they must have done so. Miss Edge told me they were living abroad. One of the ladies is ill, I think she said, and I believe it was that that took them to France."

"Do you know," inquired Mr. Stratton, "which of them was ill?"

"Not the one who used to be here, sir. I'm sure of that; but I don't know how many others there are."

Mr. Stratton mused for a minute, then having duly inquired after Mr. Archer, he said, "I'm glad you can give so good an account of Miss Edge;" and wishing Mrs. Archer "good-bye," he rode away. For about half a mile he rode quite slowly; then, opening a gate which took him into the fields where the turf was firm, and grass very short, he put his horse's powers to the test, and the animal almost flew along, thoroughly enjoying a glorious gallop over the smooth, elastic surface of the ground beneath him, and carrying his rider in a very short space of time several miles nearer Stratton Park than Mr. Archer's farm. He pulled

his horse into a canter as he neared the great embankment being raised for the new line of railway, and then rode quietly along, watching the navvies who swarmed like bees about it. As he neared them many touched their hats, receiving a pleasant smile and good-natured nod in return. One of the gangsmen came up to him, and began telling him about some of the men who were ill in the neighbouring village, and he proceeded to thank Mr. Stratton for kindness which had been shown to them at his desire. Some further conversation on matters of a like nature ensued before Mr. Stratton left the neighbourhood of the line and proceeded on his way again. He left the fields, and rode along a somewhat narrow lane, where he overtook a funny-looking little bent old man, who was driving a couple of small black pigs before him.

"How are you to-day, Sampson?" he asked.

"Bless yer honour!" replied the old man, starting with surprise at hearing himself suddenly addressed, and then pulling off his hat in all haste, he continued speaking in a most curious series of jerks: "Bless yer honour!—Well, I never!—I never heard ye coming!—and the chimney, he's as right as a trivet. There—it's all done beautiful, *beautiful* as my old dooman says; and blessings on yer honour's head, I hope, will follow."

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Stratton, smiling; "I'm glad it's all right. And how is your wife to-day?"

"Middling, and that's the truth; but, for all that, she walks across to the window. There ain't no draught now; and—there she'll sit, and enjoy it, and she's never tired of talking of all you've done to the old place for us. You see, sir," (and here he stopped short,) "to have left it, after we'd lived there fifty mortal years, would just have broken her heart clean in two;" and he brought down his stick on the ground with tremendous emphasis, to give additional force to his words.

While talking with old Sampson, Mr. Stratton was joined by his steward, and with him he rode on to inspect some new farm buildings. Then he looked at some lately finished, comfortable-looking cottages, into which first occupants were getting their furniture and household goods; and having made some inquiries after one or two labourers' families, he finally stopped at a new building, which served the purpose of reading-room and school-chapel, and which had been built chiefly with a view to the navvies' benefit. There he found the young clergyman, who had been curate to the rector of the parish since the railway works began, and with him were Mrs. Nugent, her daughter, and two other young ladies, who it seemed had taken a sudden fancy to visit and inspect the arrangements made for the railway labourers.

Miss Nugent was loud in her expressions of interest in every thing she saw, and pronounced

Mr. Stratton to be a public benefactor, stating it as her settled conviction that but for him they would all have been murdered long ago, which she was persuaded would have been the case had he not promptly taken measures for taming the terrible wild set of animals she had always understood the navvies to be.

"We have been to call at Northcourt, Mr. Stratton," said Mrs. Nugent; "but Lady North was out, unfortunately for us. It is quite a comfort to see the place looking as it used, once more; and to have the family home again."

"Yes," replied he; "I am very glad they are come back. I scarcely know them, but I fancy they are very nice people."

"Oh! you will be quite sure to like them," said Miss Nugent. "We have always been so very intimate, that I speak from experience. By-the-bye, Mr. Stratton, I heard such a curious story the other day about you and the governess who used to be there; that Miss Stourton, I mean. I want so much to know if it's true?"

Mr. Stratton looked amazed; whereupon Miss Nugent, excessively delighted at observing the expression on his face which her words had unintentionally called up, went into a fit of laughter, and for a minute could not utter a word.

"Indeed, Miss Nugent," said Mr. Stratton, "I am utterly unable to conceive to what you allude; is it something very amusing?"

"Ah! you are guilty, veritably guilty, I see the fact written in your face," she said, amid bursts of laughter.

"How insufferable this girl is!" said Mr. Stratton to himself; "what on earth is she talking about?"

Miss Nugent, however, could scarcely be said to be talking; for she continued to do nothing but laugh; only making some incoherent attempt to speak from time to time.

"What is the matter, Maria?" asked Mrs. Nugent, when she observed her.

"Miss Nugent is talking riddles," said Mr. Stratton, "and laughing most unmercifully at me for not being able to guess them. I wish, Mrs. Nugent, you would have pity on me, and read them for me."

"Mamma knows nothing about it," gasped Miss Nugent, at length. "She is no party to the mystery. But," she added, "seeing that I shall have no chance of hearing your version of the story unless I give you a clue to my meaning, I will ask if you did not once possess a white penknife?"

Mr. Stratton's face cleared in a moment, and he replied by inquiring whether, if he mentioned that he had once possessed two white penknives, it would assist her in her explanation. Then, seeing Mrs. Nugent about to get into her carriage, he went to help her, the three young ladies following quickly; for Mrs. Nugent began telling them that it was so much later than she imagined that they

must go directly, or they should never be at some house where they were to dine that night till the dinner was half over.

Mr. Stratton said "good-bye," and strongly recommended Miss Nugent to content herself with the story as she had heard it, as hers was sure to be a better version than the original; stories being proverbially improved, rather than impaired, in the telling.

"How shockingly sarcastic!" exclaimed Miss Nugent, as the carriage drove off.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands;
Every moment lightly shaken ran itself in golden sands.
Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might—
Smote the chord of self, which, trembling, passed in music out of sight."

TENNYSON.

IT was a December afternoon,—Christmas was near at hand, and seemed likely to arrive decked in the picturesque garb of snow wreaths and icicles, for already the ground was snow-clad, and the thermometer stood at 28 degrees. Consequently, out of doors it was very cold indeed; but not so in-doors at Northcourt, where bright fires burnt cheerily on every hearth, and which was as full of people as could be with any degree of comfort accommodated in the house. A large party was staying there, among whom were the Nugents, and Lord Brinkworth, Sir Gaspard and Lady Howick, her sister Miss Long, and Lord Herbert Ross; also Mr. Stratton, who had just arrived. As there was to be an addition to the dinner-party, it was decided that there should be a

school-room tea-party; so Margaret Stourton had to entertain Miss May and Miss Long, and a most merry party they were. As Lady North passed the door, she heard such talking and laughing that she went into the school-room to see what was going on.

"Why, you banished ones don't seem after all to find your destiny a very hard one," she said, and she put her hand on Margaret's shoulder, and went on to say, "I have just heard a piece of news. Mr. Stratton—(Margaret's shoulder gave a slight twitch, 'is *really* going to be married this time,' she said to herself,) has offered the living of Stratton to Mr. Shirley, and he is likely to accept it."

"Really! is it true?"

"Yes; Mr. Stratton has heard from Mr. Shirley that he likes the idea of it very much, and he has just told me about it."

"Oh! Mr. Stratton is come, then, is he?" said Maude.

"Yes, the train was delayed by the snow; that was why he did not arrive earlier."

After a few more words Lady North said, "You all look so comfortable that I am quite sorry to leave such a pleasant-looking party; but there is the bell, so go I must, but I shall find you all in the drawing-room after dinner."

It had been no great trial to Margaret to resume her place as head of the Northcourt school-room. The delight of the children at exchanging 'Miss Kücken' for 'Miss Stourton' was unbounded, and

Lady North was scarcely less charmed to have her again with them. Margaret's fifty pounds had been a great assistance to the family at home; but the greater part of it was now spent. For years their poverty had been such, that every thing in the house was reduced to a state of 'rags and tatters,' and Margaret had had the pleasure of refurnishing her mother's room, putting a new carpet in the little drawing-room, buying two arm-chairs, and purchasing a number of other useful and necessary articles which had long been wanting in the house. There were various other ways, too, in which she had contributed to the general benefit of the family, and, in doing so, pleased none of them more than herself. She felt what an agreeable thing it was to possess the power, which her fairly earned money gave her, of increasing the comfort of those about whom she was most interested. Her father and mother knew that she was sure of meeting with the utmost kindness and consideration at Northcourt, and they knew she had been, on the whole, happy there. They therefore consented to let her return, and Margaret felt that another year of governess life would once more fill her now nearly exhausted purse.

In the evening, as the ladies sat talking and lazily working at embroidery, Margaret found it very difficult to keep up her attention to subjects which were being discussed or detailed. Coffee had come in, and the servants had returned to take

away the empty cups; the hands of the clock on the mantel-piece pointed to half-past eight, and the little bell struck the half-hour; a few minutes more and the drawing-room door opened: the third gentleman who entered was Mr. Stratton; the next minute he was shaking hands with Margaret, and in another he had taken the chair nearest to her.

She was very glad when her heart stopped beating so quickly, and she had quite regained the self-possession which for a moment, though unperceived by others, she had lost. Yes, evidently the person he cared to converse with was Margaret; and when after a while she turned to speak to Miss Long, and then went to sing with Miss May and Lord Herbert, Mr. Stratton sat quite silent, merely looking towards the piano from time to time. He was roused at length from his reverie by Lady Howick, who addressed a question to him; and she continued to talk to him for some time. And so passed the evening, like many others; there was singing, laughing, and talking, but Margaret herself was hardly aware of what was going on. During a part of the evening Mr. May had been a good deal devoted to her, but did not find her as agreeable as usual; and finally, much to her relief, he was monopolized by Miss Nugent, while Lord Brinkworth was talking elsewhere.

* * * * *

Twenty-four hours passed—dinner was over. Already carriages had arrived, and the cheerful sounds of instrumental music came from the large

uncarpeted drawing-room, which, however, was as yet untenanted save by some half-dozen musicians, who were occupied in tuning their instruments, and discussing the merits of new valses and sets of quadrilles.

The folding-doors were open between the drawing-rooms: it was evident that ere long the larger of the two was destined to be filled with dancers. Among a group assembled in front of the blazing fire in the lesser room, there were gentlemen putting on their gloves, and even selecting partners; while a charming buzz of happy voices mingled with laughter prevailed. Sir Roger was very busy and very active, as the young host; and was constantly flitting about, now making his bow to new comers, and now going to his mother's side to assist her in entertaining them.

"Mother," he said at last, "I think we may as well begin dancing, don't you? There are plenty here for a quadrille. Those fellows have been tuning up for the last half-hour. They'll break their fiddles over each other's heads, for want of something better to do, if we don't make haste. Will you come now?"

"With all my heart, my dear boy; we will make a general move, unless," she added, turning towards Lady Howick, "you prefer remaining in this room a little longer?" But Lady Howick was quite in favour of moving.

"I think we are engaged for the first quadrille, Miss May?" said Sir Roger.

"I believe so," she replied.

"Well, I must secure a *vis-a-vis* then. Have you any choice? Oh! Herbert, have you got a partner yet? because we are going to begin. I beg your pardon, Miss May, did you say who it should be? as *vis-a-vis*, I mean."

Having smoothed his moustache, Captain May proceeded to ask Margaret to dance with him.

"Thank you," she answered; "but I am already engaged for this quadrille."

He then requested the next valse, to which she agreeing, he left her, to find a partner for the quadrille elsewhere. The dancing-room was soon filled, and a large quadrille was formed. It was a particularly pretty one, Lady North thought; and although a shade of sadness often crossed her brow during that evening, she looked with pleasure on the bright and happy young faces round her, and especially on those of her children, and rejoiced to think that sorrow had left no shadow there deep enough to dim the sense of present enjoyment. Sir Roger had found no difficulty in securing Mr. Stratton and Margaret as *vis-a-vis*, as Miss May had suggested he should. A look of amusement sparkled in her eyes, mingled with one of pleasure, when, as they took their places, she succeeded in catching a smile from Margaret, which was instantly followed by the slightest possible brightening of colour. Miss Nugent was dancing with Edward Shirley, Captain May with Maude North, Lord Brinkworth with Miss Long, while Lord Her-

bert Ross had good-naturedly selected Fanny, to whom he was as usual talking no small amount of amusing nonsense, thereby causing her to make no end of mistakes in the figures she was or ought to have been dancing. He was always so good-natured to children, and Fanny looked delighted.

The quadrille over, a valse succeeded it almost immediately. Mr. Stratton stood leaning against one of the folding-doors, apparently listening to the music, and at intervals talking a little to Lady North, while at the same time he watched with much attention the movements of one couple among the dancers—in short, Captain May and Margaret. She wore a pink dress that evening,—a colour which suited her complexion particularly well. It was simply, but well and prettily made. Her hair, too, which was also simply arranged, was nevertheless, by Maude's and Fanny's express desire, dressed by their maid in the way most becoming to the style of Margaret's features, and she looked exceedingly nice. There were few prettier faces in the room than hers, and certainly none more pleasing. The pink dress was a present, and well chosen.

"Come, Stratton," said Sir Roger, as with his partner he paused a moment; "you have not earned repose yet, and this is such a first-rate valse, too."

"It is," he answered; and seeing that Maude was sitting down, he went and asked her if she would not like to dance. She was only too happy,

and, proud of such a partner, accepted him with great pleasure. He asked her whether they had made many more sketches after he had seen her drawing in the park in the summer. She said they had, and that both she and Margaret had sketched the church and rectory, as he had proposed they should. She told him that Miss Stourton's was really a pretty picture, so very like; but that the subject was too difficult a one for herself, although she could draw better now, since Miss Stourton had been giving her regular drawing lessons; "which she is so kind about," added Maude.

"She is very kind, I suppose?" said Mr. Stratton.

"Oh! yes; indeed she is," replied Maude.

"Are you all fond of her?" he asked.

"Yes, that we are; and mamma finds she likes her quite as much as we had told her we knew she would." Maude went on talking about Margaret, telling Mr. Stratton what great pains she had taken with Oliver; how hard she had worked in various ways to improve herself, that she might be able to continue to teach them as they grew older, and how every body liked her; "but not one bit more than she ought to be liked; and," added Maude, "mamma says it is for her parents' sake that she consented to become a governess. They are such nice people, too. They were staying here once for a week."

"So I heard," he answered; "do you know her brother at all?"

"No," said Maude, "do you?"

"I met him at Mr. Leslie's a short time ago. He is my uncle's curate. But come, we must have one more turn before this valse is over."

He danced twice with Margaret after this, at different times during the evening; causing some remarks to be made thereby, for he was no heartless flirt, it was well known; but as he scarcely danced with any one else it did seem rather remarkable.

"Who is that young lady who is dancing with Stratton?" asked Lord Brinkworth. "It appears to me I have seen her before; and, moreover, I fancied she bowed to me when I first came in."

"You will be considerably surprised," replied Miss Nugent, with a little laugh, "when I tell you she is the *governess* here!"

"Is she, indeed?"

"Yes; and most ridiculous it is, the fuss they all make with her. She gives herself quite airs enough without being so set up by them all. They think her lovely, too, I believe. What do you think?"

"She is what people call pretty, I suppose," he answered, languidly; "and so Stratton thinks, it seems."

Miss Nugent laughed again.

"She is rather graceful; and she's well dressed," continued Lord Brinkworth, as he watched Margaret.

"As to her dress, Oliver has been telling all the world that Lady North gave it her, and calling upon them to admire it; so you are quite right to do that: she could not, of course, have afforded such an one herself."

"Ah!" he replied, "I suppose, now, that sort of thing is expensive?"

"For her, it would be, certainly, I should say," she answered, looking down with much satisfaction at her own very exquisite attire.

"What is her name?" continued Lord Brinkworth.

"Stourton,—Margaret Stourton."

"Stourton! to be sure; I recollect now."

A gentleman at that moment claimed Miss Nugent as his promised partner for a set of "Lancers," already formed; and Lord Brinkworth walked quickly across the room to where Margaret was sitting, and began making apologies to her for not recollecting her at first. He told her how completely his having met her at his sister's had escaped his memory during the earlier part of the evening: he went on to tell her that he had lately been staying with Mrs. Asheton; and he gave Margaret a long account of his sister, and talked of various events that had taken place in the Wilton neighbourhood, which Margaret was much interested in hearing about.

Evening had now for some hours been succeeded by night, and the room was being gradually thinned of its gay occupants. Night was in its turn giving

place to morning, and again those who were staying in the house, having taken leave of the last of the other guests, were gathered round the drawing-room fire in animated discussion on various topics connected with the party, till at length Lady North put a stop to further arguments by saying, "Now, you sleepy children, you must really go off to bed, or you will all be unfit for any thing to-morrow."

So Margaret and the children, Miss Long, and her cousin Miss Stewart, all of whom Lady North said she included in the term "children," accepting candles from the gentlemen, left the room, soon to be followed by the elders.

The moment Margaret was alone in her room, she locked her door, and threw herself on her knees by her little table. At length, rising, she put her door ajar, and stood listening. Doors were closing—the last steps in the gallery had ceased; even Sir Roger had left his mother's room after his little private talk with her, and she heard him walking away, humming the air of the last valse. Then Margaret went quickly and noiselessly along the passage, and knocked at Lady North's door.

"Come in," was the answer. She went in. She looked pale. Lady North took her hand, kissed her, and told her to sit down.

"No, thank you," she answered, and speaking brought the colour back into her cheek; and it got brighter as she said she had something to say to Lady North. "Something,—in short, she thought

it right—she wished to tell her that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Stratton."

"I thought so; indeed, I felt sure it was what you had to tell me when you came in," said Lady North, speaking as though she was quite delighted with what she heard. "To say the truth, I had guessed it. And—you must not mind, for I am sure he could not help it—but Mr. Stratton said two words to me when I wished him 'Good night' in the gallery, which confirmed my suspicions."

Then she went on to congratulate Margaret, and to tell her how *very* much pleasure it gave her to do so. She said she believed her to be most fortunate; "but," she added, "not more so than *he* is," and she talked to her as if she felt as much interested for her, and as pleased, as if Margaret had been her own child. This, in the absence, too, of her mother, was particularly delightful to Margaret, who had become very fond of Lady North.

No one was to be told the news of the engagement for a few days; but Sir Roger had guessed it. His mother, however, had told him that he must on no account divulge the secret, so he contented himself with mentioning casually now and then that "Stratton was an uncommonly lucky dog!" rather to the surprise of his hearers.

Mr. Stratton left the morning after the ball, and quite early; intending, however, to return again in three days, when the other guests would all be gone.

He had not the pleasantest occupation in the world during those three days, as he had to break to Lady Vaux the astonishing fact that he was "going to marry a governess." Happily, "the Peerage" being a work with which she was well acquainted, she was able to derive some comfort from it, after a slight research, by tracing Margaret's pedigree to a viscount; and she also discovered that her future daughter-in-law could count cousinship with a baronet, as well as several honourables. All this was indeed highly consolatory, though it cannot be said that she looked upon the alliance with any thing like satisfaction or pleasure, and she even mentioned it in conversation as "his ridiculous folly;" generally, however, adding something about Sir Edward Stourton; and also saying that "Miss Stourton was decidedly pretty, she believed," and "remarkably lady-like, she was told."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Who is Silvia, what is she,
That all our swains commend her?"

SHAKSPEARE.

"WELL, Maria, we have been longing for your return," said her aunt, as Miss Nugent entered the room late one afternoon. "Your mother and I are the dullest companions in the world for each other; two people with the influenza are enough to drive one another into despair. Who have you seen? and what have you heard?"

"Fortunately for you and mamma," said Maria, throwing herself into one arm-chair, and her hat into another, "I have seen every body I wanted to see, and heard nearly as much as I wanted to hear."

"Oh, how delightful! Now do begin; draw your chair in close to the fire, and make yourself comfortable, and then tell us all about it. Now, where did you go first?"

"Why, I went first to the Manor. Miss May was of course in a state of ecstasy about her friend's good fortune. She is to go to Captain

Stourton's, as she is to be a bridesmaid. A good long journey to take; but she is delighted. Captain May looked sufficiently gloomy, I thought; because he is not going too, I suppose. Miss May says she hears that Lady Vaux is still very angry, but the sisters are getting over it. Mr. William Stourton and Mr. Asheton are to marry them. Two clergymen have a grander effect than one, of course, and the Miss Vauxes will be two of the bridesmaids: they are to stay at the hotel at Donbury for the wedding, I believe; it is not far from Teesdale; and the Stourtons' house is very small—a mere cottage by the road side, I am told. I wonder what Mr. Stratton thinks of their living in such a house? I suppose it is all a part of the poetry of his 'poetical engagement,' as somebody called it. After the Mays, I went to Northcourt, where I found the whole family at home. Actually there is some idea that Maude will go to Mrs. Asheton's, and be at the wedding! They are all perfectly ridiculous on the subject, I think. Sir Roger made us all laugh by saying that Mr. Stratton was in such a hurry that he had stepped in before *him*, but rumour asserts that his devotion to Miss May is great: he certainly danced a great deal with her the night of the party at Northcourt. I observed it, and so did others."

"But what happens about the living? Is young Mr. Stourton to have it?" asked Mrs. Nugent.

"No, actually that young piece of perfection is not to have it. Lady North says they were all

pleased with him. He was at Northcourt one whole day, before he took his sister home. But Sir Roger, it appears, wished the living to be offered to a tutor he had some time ago. And he means to take it; otherwise, I believe, young Mr. Stourton might have had it."

"And when is the wedding to take place?"

"This day six weeks, they think. It is an anniversary day in Miss Stourton's family, it seems, and Mr. Stratton would not like to wait till Easter, at least so the Norths say. I was rather surprised to find it was to be so soon, I confess, but I don't know any reason against it if they see none. Her family must think her extraordinarily fortunate, and I dare say they think the sooner it's all done the better."

"I dare say they do," said Mrs. Nugent. "How little they could have anticipated such a piece of good fortune for her as his breaking his arm and having to stay at the rectory till he recovered!"

"If Lady Vaux had known what danger of another kind than that he had run in his fall was at hand," said Miss Nugent, "she would have carried him off by force, or pitched a tent for herself in the rectory garden, and guarded her precious son with a revolver! They say she was fearfully angry when she first heard of the marriage."

"Well, so I should imagine," said Mrs. Nugent. "Just fancy now what I should feel if I heard that Hugh had committed himself to some such folly.

It is setting such an example to other young men. It is terrible to think what it may lead to in that way. A man in his position ought to have thought of that. I declare I shall quite dread Hugh's letters now, or letting him go out visiting, unless I go too."

"Yes, mamma, I advise you to take care; there is Miss Edge, who is greatly to be feared now, for she is growing quite handsome. I advise your forbidding Hugh to set foot in the neighbourhood of the rectory, for if he does he will run into terrific danger."

"Miss Edge, who is she? You frighten me, Maria."

"Well, she is Miss Edge; she used to live with the Barings. I saw her there once or twice, but she always looked so sour and cross that I carefully avoided any notice of her; but to-day I saw her at the Shirleys', looking so surprisingly pleasant that I was astonished at the change; and when I said 'How d'ye do?' she positively did look as if she could smile. She was a great friend of Miss Stourton's, I believe, and Miss Stourton recommended her to the Shirleys. Of course, they are all in a state of rapture about the marriage there, so, as I began to feel that I had had enough of it, I did not stay very long."

"Don't you like Miss Stourton, Maria?" inquired her aunt.

"Oh! well enough; but I'm so bored with hearing of her perfections. She is very delightful,

I dare say, but I thought she gave herself prodigious airs when I saw her at Northcourt, so I have never cultivated her acquaintance. I suppose I shall now, as her grandeur will suit her better as Mrs. Stratton than it did as Miss Stourton. I suppose she was always expecting to make some great match, and behaved herself accordingly; but as she did not impart her intentions to me, I was not prepared for their fulfilment."

"She is more fortunate then than most castle-builders, I fancy," said the aunt, laughing, "that is if report speaks truth of Mr. Stratton; but I think that is a little bit of malice on your part, Maria, so I shan't believe it."

"Oh, dear! if you are going to turn Stourton-worshipper, Aunt Jane, I don't know what I shall do."

"Adopt my creed at once," said her aunt. "Depend upon it you cannot do better."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

"There comes a sound of marriage bells."

AND so they were married; and every one said what a pretty wedding it was; and every body who knew Mr. Stratton rejoiced for Margaret in such an ending to her year of governess life.

After all, the marriage was not at all above that which she might very likely have made, had she not left home owing to the desire to help her family, so that no one need really have felt surprise that she should marry Mr. Stratton. The only thing that could really be in any way surprising was, that Mr. Stratton should marry a governess. But had Margaret in fact lowered her position in society by becoming a governess? While she was in that position she had always acted with the greatest propriety, and with due recollection of the reason for her being in Lady North's house; and, on their part, the Norths had shown her the greatest consideration and kindness, and as they thoroughly liked her, and felt her to be no less a lady in the widest sense of the word than they were themselves, nothing could be more perfectly easy

than the terms they had all been on together. Lady Vaux, when she had once become acquainted with Margaret, ceased to wonder that her son had selected her to be his wife from among the numerous young ladies he met; and the two Misses Vaux pronounced that she was "not at all beneath him, after all."

Mr. Maxwell, it was now rumoured, had discovered that Lucy was the Miss Stourton he admired the most, and whether her father and mother would have her with them again for more than a short time after the expiration of the visit she was paying her brother William, seemed extremely doubtful.

Miss Edge had quite recovered her health, and was very happy with the Shirleys. She was glad indeed to have been able to accept Mrs. Shirley's offer. She said she intended to begin governess life on a new principle, and she certainly did look very unlike the Miss Edge Margaret first recollected, when, not long after her return from a six weeks' tour abroad, "Mrs. Stratton" called at the rectory and found her surrounded by a cheerful party of children hard at work at their lessons.

Great indeed was her delight at again seeing Margaret, whose manner was just as kind, if not more so, as when she used to pay those welcome visits at Mrs. Archer's farm.

Miss Edge told her she never meant to allow herself to relapse into her old ways again, if she could possibly help it, as she had so fully come to

the conclusion she had been in the wrong. "But then," she added, "I cannot but feel that my temptation to do so is greatly lessened now; indeed it scarcely exists. Every thing is so different here from what it used to be at Mrs. Baring's; nothing can well be more so, indeed; and greatest of all is the difference between Mrs. Baring and Mrs. Shirley!"

"I am very glad you are so happy," said Margaret. "My own happiness is so great that I have nothing in the wide world to wish for, with the one exception of seeing the increased happiness and comfort of those I love."

"Oh, Margaret! you *do* see it, for every one must be made happier who is loved by you; that alone must do it, if nothing else does."

"Ah! you have one great fault left still," replied Margaret, with her sweet smile. "Flatterers are dangerous friends."

THE END.

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